

Our Loving Heavenly Father



SABBATH—JUNE 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 7:9–11; John 14:8–10; Luke 15:11–24; Matthew 6:25–34; Hebrews 9:14.

MEMORY VERSE: “How great is the love the Father has given us so freely! Now we can be called children of God. And that’s [that is] what we really are! The world doesn’t [does not] know us because it didn’t [did not] know him” (1 John 3:1, NIV).

JESUS WAS GLAD TO TALK ABOUT GOD AS THE FATHER. The Gospels say that Jesus used the name *Father* for God more than 130 times. At different times, Jesus used words such as “ ‘heavenly Father’ ” (Matthew 6:14, NKJV), “ ‘living Father’ ” (John 6:57, NKJV), “ ‘Holy Father’ ” (John 17:11, NKJV), and “ ‘righteous [sinless] Father’ ” (verse 25, NKJV). The name describes the very close tie that should unite (join) us to our Lord.

Usually, a father offers love, protection, and safety, and is a provider of food for a family. A father gives a name to the family and keeps its members together. We can enjoy these and many other good things when we accept God as our heavenly Father.

It is so important for us to know the Father. But our goal should not be just knowledge. In the Bible, to know someone means to have a personal, close relationship with him or her. This is very true with our heavenly Father.

This week we will study what Jesus taught about our Father and about His unlimited love for us. We also will study more about the close relationship of the Father with the Son and with the Holy Spirit.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN (Matthew 7:9–11)

Father was not a new name for God. The Old Testament sometimes describes Him as our Father (Isaiah 63:16; Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4, 19; Psalm 103:13). But it was not the most used name for Him. For Israel, the personal name of God was *YHWH*, or Yahweh. This name for God appears more than sixty-eight hundred times in the Old Testament. Jesus did not come to show a different God than *YHWH*. Instead, His mission was to make fully known the picture that God made of Himself in the Old Testament. In doing so, Jesus showed God as our heavenly Father.

Jesus made clear that the Father is in heaven. It is important for us to remember this truth so that we can have the proper respect for God. We have a loving Father who cares deeply for the needs of His children. At the same time, we recognize that this caring Father is in heaven. This is where millions of angels worship Him because He is the only King of the universe, holy and powerful. The fact that He is our Father invites us to come to Him with the confidence (trust) of a child. But the truth that He is in heaven reminds us of His greatness, and we need to worship Him with proper respect.

Read Matthew 7:9–11. What does it tell us about how a human father can show the character (who God is) of our heavenly One?

Not everyone has had a loving, caring father. For different reasons, some may not even have known their father. So, for them to call God “my Father” may have little meaning. But all of us have an idea of what a good earthly father should be. And we may have known some people who showed what it meant to be a good father.

We know that human fathers are far from perfect. But we also know that most fathers dearly love their children, even though they have their weaknesses. And they try to give their children the best they can. Imagine, then, what our Father in heaven can do for us.

What does it mean for you as a person to recognize God as your heavenly Father? What *should* it mean to you?



**God is our loving Father,
who cares deeply
for His children.**

SHOWN BY THE SON (John 1:18)

John is talking about the Father. He says, “No one has ever seen God” (John 1:18, NIV). Since the fall of Adam and Eve, sin has blocked us from seeing God. Moses wanted to see God. But the Lord explained to him, “ ‘You can’t [cannot] see my face. . . . No one can see me and stay alive’ ” (Exodus 33:20, NIV). Even though we cannot see Him, our first goal still should be to know as much of God as we can, because to have eternal life is to know the Father (John 17:3).

What do we really need to know about God? Read Jeremiah 9:23, 24. Why are these things important for us to know?

In the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan), Satan’s main attack has been against the character of God. The devil worked very hard to make everyone believe that God is selfish and very strict. The best way to meet Satan’s charges (blame) against God was for Jesus to live on this earth to show that these charges were lies. Jesus came to show God’s nature¹ and character and to correct the wrong ideas that many had about the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). “But . . . the . . . Son has shown us what God is like” (John 1:18, NIV).

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

Jesus was made sad and surprised by Philip’s question. Jesus’ gentle scolding really shows His patient love toward His dull disciples. Jesus’ answer suggested that He may have been thinking something like this: *Is it possible that you do not know Me after walking with Me, hearing My words, seeing My miracles of feeding the crowds, of healing the sick, and of raising the dead? 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 shown the Father in the wrong light. Instead, Jesus was sure that He had fulfilled His mission of showing the Father fully. So, He could say to the disciples, “ ‘If you really knew me, you would know my Father also. From now on, you do know him. . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ ” (John 14:7, 9, NIV).

DEFINITIONS

1. nature—the way a person acts or behaves; who someone is.

THE LOVE OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER (John 3:16, 17)

Jesus came to teach us what the Old Testament had already told us. The Father cares for us with unlimited love (Jeremiah 31:3; Psalm 103:13).

“How great is the love that the Father has given us so freely! Now we can be called children of God” (1 John 3:1, NIV). It is wonderful that the all-powerful Ruler of the great universe would let us poor sinners living on this tiny planet call Him *Father*. He does so because He loves us.

What best proof did the Father give us to show His love? Read John 3:16, 17 for the answer.

Christ was not nailed to the cross to create in the Father’s heart a love for all people. Jesus’ atoning death was not the way to make the Father love us. Christ’s death on the cross happened *because* the Father had already loved us, even before the beginning of the world. And what greater proof do we have of His love than the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?

“The Father loves us, not because of the great sacrifice. But He made the sacrifice because He loves us.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 13.

Some think that the Father is not very willing to love us. Jesus is our Mediator.² But this fact does not mean that He has to encourage the Father to love us. Christ Himself removed this wrong idea when He said, “ ‘The Father Himself loves you’ ” (John 16:27, NKJV).

Read Luke 15:11–24. Then think about the love of the father of the prodigal (wandering) son. Make a list of the many examples the son had of his father’s love.

How are we, each of us in our own way, like the prodigal son? In what ways have you experienced what he went through?



Christ was not nailed to the cross to make the Father love us. He loved us already.

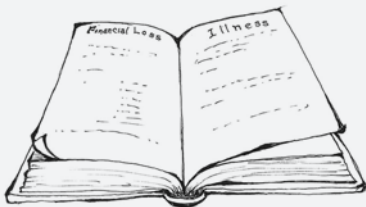
DEFINITIONS

2. Mediator—go-between; Jesus is our Mediator or go-between, bringing us sinners back to God.

THE MERCIFUL CARE OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER (Matthew 6:25–34)

It is important to know that we are cared for. Some people may be uncaring toward us. But Jesus taught that our heavenly Father cares for us in every possible way. The Father's love and mercy do not depend on human emotions (strong feelings). His love is steadfast and unchanging, no matter what happens.

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



**No chapter in our lives
is too dark for our loving
Father to read.**

“There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read. There is no problem too hard for Him to solve. No accident can happen to the least of His children without His notice. No worry can bother the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer can fail to escape our lips that our heavenly Father fails to notice or care about. ‘He heals those who have broken hearts. He takes care of their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3, NIV. The relations between God and each soul are as close and full for each person as if there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 100.

Even with all the encouraging words here, we cannot ignore the fact that tragedy and suffering strike us. Even in the verses for today, Jesus spoke of how “ ‘each day has enough trouble of its own’ ” (Matthew 6:34, NIV). By this verse, Jesus suggested that not everything will go well for us. We do have to live with evil and its sad and terrible results. But we can be sure of the Father's love for us, a love shown to us by the Cross. How important it is that we always remember the gifts and blessings of our heavenly Father. If not, we can easily become discouraged when evil strikes, which it surely does.

In what ways, during a time of trouble, did you realize how real God's love was for you? What did you learn from that experience that you can share with someone else who might be struggling with the same problems?

THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT (Luke 1:26–35)

In different ways, Jesus taught and showed that Three Persons make up the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We cannot explain this truth with human reasoning. But we accept it by faith (like many of the truths shown in Scripture). Together with Paul, we try to gain a full “knowledge of the mystery of God” (Colossians 2:2, NKJV). There is much we do not understand. But we can seek by faith, obedience, prayer, and study to learn more and more.

The Three Persons of the Godhead were active during the most important parts of Jesus’ life. Summarize what Each One did in the following events: Birth—Luke 1:26–35; Baptism—Luke 3:21, 22; Crucifixion—Hebrews 9:14.

Jesus’ earthly ministry (work done for God) was about to finish. He promised His distressed disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit. Here again we find the Three Persons working together. “ ‘I will ask the Father,’ ” Jesus promised them. “ ‘And He will give you another Friend to help you and to be with you forever. The Friend is the Spirit of truth’ ” (John 14:16, 17, NIV; read also verse 26).

Jesus explained that there is complete agreement and cooperation between the Three Persons in the plan of salvation. The Son gave the Father the glory (praise; honor) by showing His love (John 17:4). In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives the Son glory by showing His grace³ and love to the world as well (John 16:14).

Think through some of the other truths that are hard for the human mind to understand. At the same time, think about many things in the natural world that are hard to understand too. What should these mysteries tell us about the limits of the human mind and the need to live by faith? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.



Jesus promised His disciples He would send the Holy Spirit.

DEFINITIONS

3. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “A Personal God,” pages 263–278, in *Testimonies⁴ for the Church*, volume 8.

“To make our confidence [faith] stronger in God, Christ teaches us to call Him by a new name. This is a name closely tied to the human heart. Jesus gives us the honor of calling God our Father. This name is a sign of our love and trust toward God. This is also a promise of His love for us. We use His name as we pray. He has asked us to use this name again and again so that we may love Him, instead of fearing Him.

“God recognizes us as His children. He has saved us out of the careless world and has chosen us to become members of His family, as 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 be. This love has no measure.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 141, 142.

“Our heavenly Father has shown his love for each one of us on the cross of Calvary. The Father loves us. He is full of love and mercy.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*[®], September 30, 1889.

DEFINITIONS

4. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Suppose someone tells you that he or she cannot love God and trust in Him as a heavenly Father. This is because of his or her bad experiences with an earthly father. How, then, could you help this person to love God and have faith in Him?
- ② We know God loves us. So why is there suffering?
- ③ As a class, go over your answers to Thursday’s final question.
- ④ Think about the great size of the universe. Think, too, that Jesus, who created it, also died for us on the cross. How can we fully understand and accept this wonderful, hopeful news? How can we learn to enjoy this wonderful example of God’s love?