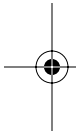


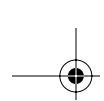
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Knowing God as a Father in Action

When I arrived in my first parish as a newly ordained curate (assistant pastor), I was responsible for coordinating the team of youth leaders. One of the other curates, who had done this job for the previous two years, was commending a young married couple who were part of the team. “They are pure gold,” he said to me. I had not even met them yet, but he knew them very well, and that was the metaphor he chose to explain to me their high quality and great value. The better we know someone, the more we find metaphors that sum up what they are like and what they mean to us. “She’s a pillar of the community.” “He’s the life and soul of the party.” “She’s like a rock for her whole family.” “He’s a walking volcano.” “She’s an oasis of common sense.” “He’s a loose cannon.” “She’s a bit of a butterfly.”

The Bible is rich in metaphors for God, and for the same reason. We are invited to know God as deeply and intimately as is humanly possible. And the more we know God, the more we will find ways of expressing who he is and what he means to us. Knowing God is one of the richest themes in the Old Testament. It is something that takes many different shapes, and happens in many different contexts. Not surprisingly, then, the Old Testament is rich in metaphors that people of faith used to describe the God they had come to know in all these ways.

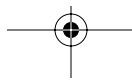


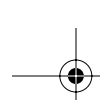


We are familiar with the commonest of these, since they dominate the landscape of Old Testament faith, worship and theology. Yahweh is king, judge and redeemer. Those are human images. There are other less common human analogies, like Yahweh as shepherd, as teacher, as soldier, as farmer. And of course there are many non-human metaphors also: Yahweh is a rock, a shelter, a shield, a hiding place, a lion, fire, a spring of water, etc.

Surprisingly, the metaphor of God as Father is not as common as we might have expected. As we shall see in a moment, the Israelites certainly did not overlook the rich store of metaphorical meaning in thinking of Yahweh their God in relation to the common human experience of fatherhood. But they were reticent with the concept of Yahweh as Father at one level (in worship), while quite free with it at another (in personal names).

Only rather rarely do Old Testament texts speak about, or speak to, Yahweh as Father in contexts of worship or devotion. In the book of Psalms, for example, God is only once referred to as “my Father” (by the king, in Psalm 89:26, and never directly by any psalmist), and God is compared to a human father only three times (see below). The most likely reason for this is that Israel chose to reject the pagan and mythological notions of divine parenthood that were common in surrounding religions. In the polytheistic environment, gods and goddesses engaged in sexual congress and gave birth to all kinds of phenomena, including some nations. The monotheistic faith of Israel rejected such a view of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Israel had not been literally conceived and birthed by Yahweh, or by any female goddess with whom Yahweh had consorted to produce offspring. So while they certainly made use of familial metaphors (husband-wife, conception and birth, parent-child) to portray the relationship, they did not elevate them into primary forms of address





to God or of discourse about God. And when they did use them, they were very careful to rule out the pagan mythical conceptions.

So, for example, Jeremiah parodies the sexual fertility cult of the Canaanites, which had badly infected Israel in his day. They used a standing stone to symbolize the phallic sacred male, and a tree or a wooden pole to symbolize the sacred female. Jeremiah mocks the worship of this sexual pairing that was credited with some kind of divine parenthood by the worshiper—reversing the polarity.

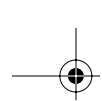
They say to wood, “You are my father,”
and to stone, “You gave me birth.” (Jer 2:27)

If this was the way people used “my father” in worship, it’s no wonder the orthodox Old Testament faith tended to avoid it.

And yet, while somewhat reticent to address God as Father in the context of worship, Israel was quite free in using the idea of Yahweh as Father in another way—and that is in the area of personal names. The word *theophoric* is used to describe human names that include part or all of the name of a god. My own name, for example, Christopher (which is Greek, meaning, “Christ-bearer”) is theophoric. So are Theodore, or Dorothy (gift of God), and Timothy (honored by God). Most cultures are rich in theophoric names. The names of the Babylonian gods, Bel and Nebo, for example, are found in Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar. In India, names compounded from Ram and Krishna are very common. Abdulla (servant of Allah) is common in Arabic speaking nations. And so on.

El is one of the commonest names for God (the high God across the whole ancient Near East). And Yahweh was often shortened to *Yah*, or *Yeho*, or *Yo*. Thus, the wide range of Israelite names that begin or end with El (Eliezer, Elimelech, Nathaniel, etc.); or that begin with Jeho-, or Jo- (Jehoshaphat, Joshua, Jonathan); or end in -iah, or -ijah





(Obadiah, Elijah, Azariah, Adonijah)—are all theophoric. They are little phrases, or affirmations about God or Yahweh, built into a personal name.

Now in Hebrew, the word for father is *ab*. “My father” is *abi*. So when *ab* or *abi* is put together with *el* or one of the abbreviations of Yahweh, then the name becomes a statement about God as Father, or as “my Father.” So, we have the following possibilities—all attested in the names of the Old Testament.

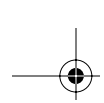
Abiel	God is my father (1 Sam 9:1)
Eliab	My God is father (1 Sam 16:6)
Joab	Yahweh is father (2 Sam 8:16)
Abijah	Yahweh is my father (this can be a man or woman’s name—see 2 Chron 29:1)
Abimelech	My father is king (where “king” probably refers to God, Judg 9:1)



The common occurrence of these names shows that the idea of God, or Yahweh, as father was well known and accepted. After all, a person called Abijah walking around the place was making a theological statement—“Yahweh is my father”—every time he gave his name, or was greeted by others. Parents who decided to call their son “Joab,” “Yahweh is Father,” had some metaphoric understanding of his and their relationship to Yahweh as father. So even if the term was not on the lips of Israelites in regular worship, it was on their lips in everyday speech as they used their own common names.

What message, then, did the metaphor contain? In this chapter we shall look at some general aspects of what it meant to call God Father, or to compare him with human fathers. In the next chapter we shall look more particularly at how the relationship between God and Israel as a nation (which was much more commonly described as a





covenant, of course), could be seen in father-son terms, and what that implied.

So let us open up some rather warm-hearted Old Testament texts in which we will discover that God can be portrayed as

- the Father who carries his children, in whom we can trust
- the Father who disciplines his children, to whom we should submit
- the Father who pities his children, to whom we should be grateful
- the Father who adopts the homeless or fatherless, in whom we find security

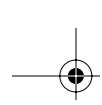
GOD—THE FATHER WHO CARRIES

The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how *the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son*, all the way you went until you reached this place. (Deut 1:30-31, italics added)

We have all seen a father pick up and carry a child in his arms, on his back or shoulders. Usually it is because the child is tired, or the terrain is difficult or dangerous—and sometimes it is because the child is being fractious and disobedient. There's something of all these in the picture Moses paints here.

Moses' memoirs of Israel's journeying since leaving Egypt fill Deuteronomy 1—3. By the start of Deuteronomy, Israel had reached the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan from the Promised Land. But it had been a long and convoluted journey. In fact, as Deuteronomy 1:2-3 laconically points out, a journey that should have taken eleven days had lasted forty years! And the reason for that was Israel's refusal to go in and take the land when the opportunity and command to do so was given them by God.





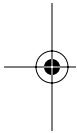
Deuteronomy 1:19-46 recalls the events at Kadesh Barnea, first described in Numbers 13—14. The bad report of ten of the spies sent out to reconnoiter the land sent the people into a tailspin of grumbling rebellion and inferiority complex. In a panic, they refused to go any further. It is in this context that Moses spoke the words quoted above. He appealed to their experience of God’s provision so far, how God had rescued them from Egypt and then protected and provided for them in the wilderness. And in this, says Moses, the LORD carried you, just like a father carrying his son. Perhaps he has in mind the image of carrying that God himself had used:

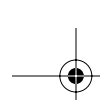
You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. (Ex 19:4)

Moses simply transfers the transport from parent birds to parent humans. The point is the same—caring, strong, parental protection and support.

Unfortunately, our text goes on to say that even this was not enough to persuade the people. “In spite of this,”—that is, in spite of all their eyes had seen and all they had experienced of God’s fatherly support—“you did not trust in the LORD your God” (Deut 1:32). And so they ended up in the wilderness for a whole generation—where they continued to experience God’s fatherly action, though in a somewhat different way (as we shall see in a moment).

Another text uses the picture of God as the parental porter to great effect. In Isaiah 46, the prophet first pours scorn on the gods of Babylon. When their city falls, far from these gods being able to come down to rescue their *worshippers*, they can’t even stoop down to rescue their own *statues!* So these “gods” have to be carried out of the city on oxcars. What kind of god is that? is the implied question. By contrast, God says,





Listen to me, O house of Jacob
 all you who remain of the house of Israel,
 you whom I have upheld since you were conceived,
 and have carried since your birth.
 Even to your old age and gray hairs
 I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
 I have made you and I will carry you;
 I will sustain you and I will rescue you (Is 46:3-4).

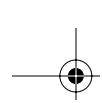
The text does not actually name God as Father, but it certainly has that picture in mind, since it speaks of God carrying Israel from birth. This is not, however, like a human father who at some point has to give up carrying his children—usually when they grow bigger than he is! God carries his people from the cradle to the grave. He is our maker, carrier, sustainer and rescuer (Is 46:4)—all supremely fatherly qualities.

The point of Moses' reference to God as the carrying Father was to urge the people to trust him in the future, since he had not failed them in the past. The point of Isaiah's similar language was to urge the people not to be intimidated by the dazzling gods of Babylon, which would soon have to be carted away by the very people they were supposed to protect. Rather they should trust in the God of their history, who had carried them all this way and would do so to the very end. Which would you prefer—a god you have to carry yourself when you most need him, or the God who carries you from start to finish? God the Fraud, or God the Father?

GOD—THE FATHER WHO DISCIPLINES

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would



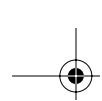


keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that *as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.* (Deut 8:2-5, italics added)

Moses is still writing his memoirs. The wilderness had not been entirely wasted time. It had been an education. In fact, it was a learning experience for God as well as for Israel. What God wanted to know was what was in the hearts of his people, and whether or not they would learn to obey him. Our text sounds somewhat like an experimental laboratory in which various tests are carried out to examine a new product. So the privations of the wilderness journey functioned to test and to teach. In that sense, they were disciplinary.

The word “discipline” does not simply mean punishment—even though there were occasions of that in the wilderness. Rather it means the necessary strictness, constraints, limitation and rigor that are essential for any kind of effective learning. In modern times we associate such discipline with the school or college environment, or any place of disciplined training. In Israel, education took place in the household and was the primary responsibility of the father. So, once again, God is compared to a father—a father who will allow his children to experience tough times and even severe challenges, precisely in order that they will learn from them, and a father who will not shrink from exercising all necessary dimensions of discipline to ensure that the learning takes place. Discipline, in this sense, is a very positive word, because of the results and blessings that flow from ex-





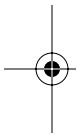
exercising it (on oneself), or being the willing object of it (on the part of God or one's father or teacher).

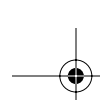
Such discipline is a function of parental love, and quite different, of course, from arbitrary domestic violence and excessive punishment that arises from sheer anger or brutality and produces alienation and despair. That is why the wise father figure depicted in Proverbs not only urges the younger learner repeatedly to respect the wisdom and authority of his earthly father and mother, but even more so, to welcome the loving discipline of the LORD.

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline
and do not resent his rebuke,
because *the LORD disciplines those he loves,*
as a father the son he delights in. (Prov 3:11-12, italics added)

Jesus, of course, never received his Father's rebuke. But he was certainly the Son whom his Father loved and delighted in. And yet the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus too went through the disciplinary and testing dimension of suffering, and that his obedience was, in that sense, "learned." As Hebrews puts it: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Heb 5:8). This does not mean that he had been disobedient before, but only that, for Jesus as well as for us, sonship, discipline and obedience were all linked together in his relationship with his Father.

In fact, it is hard to read Moses' account of Israel's forty years in the wilderness in Deuteronomy 8 (above), without thinking of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. Try reading those verses from within the mind of Jesus as a way of understanding how he, Jesus, not only recognized the nature of the testing he was experiencing, but also found the scriptural resources to fight back against the devil's attempt to undermine his commitment to the costly way his Father planned for





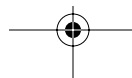
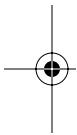
him. Jesus submitted to his Father's discipline in life, just as he willingly submitted to his Father's will in death, and in Gethsemane beforehand. In this, as in all else, Jesus models for us the true response to our heavenly Father—one of submission to his loving discipline. And it is a response which, as in so much of his life and teaching, Jesus learned from his Scriptures, the Old Testament, where this fatherly character of God is so effectively painted.

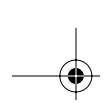
Hebrews, similarly soaked in Scriptural teaching, draws the verses from Proverbs into a moving exhortation that builds on the metaphorical transference to God of human fatherly functions and points to the positive results if only we recognize and submit to our Father in such times.

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of right-





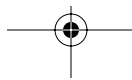
ousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:4-11)

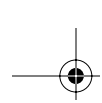
GOD—THE FATHER WHO PITIES

The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
 slow to anger, abounding in love.
 He will not always accuse,
 nor will he harbor his anger forever;
 he does not treat us as our sins deserve
 or repay us according to our iniquities.
 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is his love for those who fear him;
 as far as the east is from the west,
 so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
 As a father has compassion on his children,
 so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
 for he knows how we are formed,
 he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:8-14, italics added)

The best worship songs are those that are soaked in Scripture. The best sermons are those that expound the biblical text. Here we have a psalm that turns scriptural exposition into exquisite poetry. The psalmist's basic text is Exodus 34:6-7. This was God's declaration of his self-identity—given to Moses in the wake of the great apostasy of Israel at Mount Sinai, with the golden calf (in Exodus 32—34, which we will study in chapter three). It is a powerful statement of the character of God that echoes throughout the Bible in many forms.¹

¹It would be worth pausing to read the following texts to feel the force of these affirmations in many different moments of the life of God's people: Num 14:18; Deut 5:9-10; 1 Kings 3:6; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8, 17; 145:8; Jer 32:18-19; Lam 3:32; Dan 9:4; Jon 4:2; Nahum 1:3.





The psalmist, along with many Old Testament writers, marvels at the imbalance between the love and the anger of God. He does not, of course, minimize God’s wrath—how could he with all the narratives of the Old Testament to reflect on?—but he does put it into a minor key compared with God’s grace and compassion. God’s love is abounding; his anger is slow—that is, it is often delayed in operation. His love, as so many Scriptures affirm, is eternal; his anger will not last forever. God fully recognizes our sins, iniquities and transgressions, but does not instantly treat us as they deserve. This is the quality of grace that the psalm as a whole celebrates.

The psalmist not only revels in the affirmation of Exodus 34:6 (in Ps 103:8):

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness; (Ex 34:6)

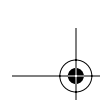
He also reflects on the first half of Exodus 34:7 (in Ps 103:10, 12):

maintaining love to thousands, and *forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.* (Ex 34:7, italics added)

For those last three words (“wickedness, rebellion and sin”) are exactly the same three Hebrew words that the psalmist lists in Psalm 103:10 and 12. These are the things that deserve God’s wrath, but God chooses *not* to “treat us according to them” (Ps 103:10, literally), but rather to “remove” them from us altogether (Ps 103:12).

Psalm 103 does not tell us why or how God can do this—only that he does, and is to be eternally thanked and praised for doing so. Exodus 34:7 actually says that God “*carries*” wickedness, rebellion and sin. He bears it (which the NIV translates as “forgiving”). Now this is interesting. Not only is this the same Hebrew word (*nasa*³) as is used in the section above for God “carrying” his people, it is also the same





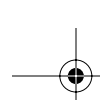
word that Isaiah uses about the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53. Whereas “we” (the unnamed observers) thought that the Servant of the Lord was undergoing all his sufferings because God was punishing him for his own sin, what we now realize, to our great surprise, is that it was actually *our* sins that he was “*carrying*”—and that he carried right through his flagrantly unjust trial and horrendously violent death.

Surely he took up our infirmities
and *carried* our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has *laid on him*
the iniquity of us all.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he *bore [carried]* the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.
(Is 53:4-6, 12, italics added)

The author of Psalm 103 exalts the forgiving grace of God, in that God does not deal with us as our sins deserve, but he is careful to

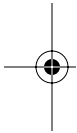


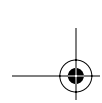


point out (though without further explanation) that this can happen only because God himself has “removed our transgressions from us.” It is other Scriptures that show us how God did the removal: by carrying them himself, in the person of his Servant. Or as Peter would later express it, unquestionably reflecting on Isaiah 53 as he wrote the words, “He [Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:24).

Poets and preachers expand their root themes with richly suggestive metaphors. So here, the psalmist colors in the compassionate grace of God in dealing with our sins by means of three metaphors. The first two are spatial—height and breadth. God’s love is as high as the heavens are above the earth. God’s moving van has transported our sins as far away as the East is from the West. And the third is relational. In behaving thus, God is like a human father who feels pity and compassion (the Hebrew word contains both emotions) for his children in their small size and physical limitations. A good father does not expect his children to have the strength of adults, and he makes allowances for their frailty. God does not expect of us more than is humanly possible. This is not to say, of course, that our sin is excusable, or that God is not grieved and angered by our wickedness and rebellion. No Old Testament psalmist could have entertained such a thought. Rather it means, simply, that God is no less understanding of all our human limitations than any good father is of his children’s vulnerability.

One might have expected the psalmist to illustrate his general point by reference back to the historical act of forgiveness that his main text comes from—the episode of the golden calf in Exodus 32—34. But instead, the fatherly comparison in Psalm 103:13 leads him right back to creation, and another text—Genesis 2:7: “The LORD God





formed the man from the *dust* of the ground” (italics added). As we have said earlier, the Old Testament resists any idea that the fatherhood of God implied any physical, sexual or biological parenting of the human race by God. Humans are not the offspring of the gods in any literal sense. Nevertheless, God is as surely the “progenitor” of humanity, by having “formed” us, as any human father is of his children. And, just as a father knows when his children were born, so God “knows our forming and remembers that dust is what we are” (a literal rendering of the Hebrew in Ps 103:14). And in that remembering lies God’s understanding of us and his fatherly compassion for us.

And in response to such fatherly factors in the character of God and in his attitude and action toward us, it is indeed right that we should summon up “all that is within us” to bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits (Ps 103:1-2, author’s translation).

GOD—THE FATHER WHO ADOPTS

Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.

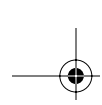
Do not reject me or forsake me,
O God my Savior.

*Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.* (Ps 27:9-10, italics added)

Sing to God, sing praise to his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds—
his name is the LORD—
and rejoice before him.

*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.*

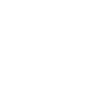
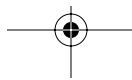


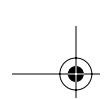


God sets the lonely in families,
he leads forth the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.
(Psalm 68:4-6, italics added)

These are the only other references to God in comparison with a human father in the book of Psalms (apart from the direct address to God as “my Father,” in the mouth of the Davidic king, in Psalm 89:26). They have in common the idea that God will step in as an adoptive father in circumstances where human parents have either disowned their child, or have left him orphaned. God, as Father, takes over where human fatherhood fails for one reason or another.

Psalm 27 begins with strong notes of faith in God and the courage it generates in the face of enemies. And it is clear that the author is indeed surrounded by enemies and stands in great need of God’s protection and provision. Psalm 27:7-9 suggests that under the pressure of the danger that surrounds him, the author is desperate for some reassurance from God that he will indeed be there for him and deliver on his promises. It is unlikely that Psalm 27:10 means that the writer has actually been literally disowned by his human parents. Rather, he probably contemplates the pain of such a devastating disgrace hypothetically as the worst possible exacerbation of his feeling of standing alone against the world. If even his parents should turn against him! But in turning to God, as he does through the whole psalm, he knows he is turning to the one whose loving commitment to him is stronger even than the strongest human bond of parent and child. God is the Father whose protection will never be withdrawn, whose commitment will outlast all earthly fatherhood. God is the Father who, if ever the believer should be left effectively fatherless, will adopt him





as his own and take him in (NIV “receive” is rather weak; the word means to take up, take in, gather in, or gather up).

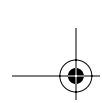
Psalm 68, overall, is a psalm celebrating the mighty power of Yahweh as the victorious God of Israel’s history. So Psalm 68:5-6 is a kind of counterpoint, celebrating the compassionate and relational nature of God alongside his enormous and triumphant strength.

God’s special concern for the orphan and widow is well documented, of course, throughout the Law and the Prophets, in the wisdom tradition (as for example in Job’s echo of this text in Job 29:12-16), and in narratives such as Elijah’s temporary accommodation with the widow of Zarephath or the story of Ruth. But here the concept is expressed not merely in the form of commands to human action (to care for the orphan and widows), but in picturing Yahweh himself as the adoptive father who takes care of the orphan, and the defending advocate who represents the widow in court and sees that she gets justice.

It is striking that in one of the very few Old Testament texts that actually speak directly of God as “father,” the prime focus is on God’s loving, protecting and defending stance toward the weak and vulnerable in human society—as typified in the most vulnerable of all, orphaned children. God is Father to those who have lost the natural bonds of human protection, whether because of rejection, or because of natural bereavement.

These are texts which surely speak with powerful and moving relevance into our world, where many people who come to faith in Christ find themselves disowned and expelled by their human families—even sometimes killed by their own fathers, and where HIV-AIDS is generating orphans and widows at a staggering rate. Loss of family is a terrible and terrifying thing in any era. The knowledge of the fatherhood of God is a biblical truth that cannot be lightly or





glibly substituted as a panacea, but certainly provides a framework of ultimate and eternal security for those who come to know and trust in their heavenly Father through saving faith in his Son.

CONCLUSION

For Israel then, knowing God included knowing certain dimensions of his character and actions that could best be expressed and reflected upon by comparison with human fatherhood (or in some cases, parenthood). The idea of God as Father was not allowed to degenerate into the kind of pagan mythology that distorted the good gift of human sexuality into a lurid parody of divine sexual antics as the origin of the human race. God had not “fathered” humans by any such means. And perhaps, as we said, this is the reason why in Old Testament times they were reluctant to refer to God simply as “God the Father,” as a title. Nevertheless, having said that, it is clear that God had acted, and could be asked to act, in ways that found analogies in the behavior of the best human fathers.

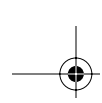
Here is God, the Father who carries his people, protecting them through all dangers, and whom we can trust like a child in his father’s arms.

Here is God, the Father who disciplines his people, but does so for their benefit and learning. The wise child will submit to such discipline, recognizing the love that motivates it.

Here is God, the Father who pities his people, remembering the simple fact of their dusty humanity from the day he formed them, and acts to carry away their sin so that it can be forgiven. Such fatherly compassion calls for our gratitude and praise.

Here is God, the Father who takes over where human fathers fail or fall, adopting those who trust in him so that they are fatherless no longer. And in that lies our eternal security.





Here is God, we can now add in the light of the New Testament, the One whom we can rightly come to know as God the Father through the fuller revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ.

There are many more dimensions to the full biblical doctrine of the Fatherhood of God, but I hope it is clear by now that, in knowing Yahweh their God, these Old Testament believers had a remarkably profound understanding of some of what it means to know God as Father.

