

1. The Master's Instructions about Himself

1.1 God the Father (Matthew 5:43 - 6:34)

The Bible word for 'father' comes from the same root as words meaning 'one who nourishes, protects and upholds'. The secret of successful Christian living is in developing a living relationship with this living God. Every morning when you leap out of bed singing at the top of your voice, you pull back the curtains and see the glories of the new day. If the curtains were on the outside of the window you could not do anything about seeing the day. Someone outside would have to pull them back for you.

We can only see God if he reveals himself to us. We cannot pull back the curtains because they are on his side of the window. We rely on the fact that he will show himself to the person who is sincerely seeking.

God is beyond our understanding. The prophet Isaiah says that the everlasting God, the Creator God, the living God, is outside the capacity of our human comprehension. The distance between God's thoughts and our thoughts is the equivalent to the difference between everything and nothing. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord in Isaiah 55:8-9.

Yet God is beckoning our understanding. If the first command, God gives us is to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, then we must assume that he wants us to know him. We cannot love someone we do not know. Jesus told the woman at the well that the Father is seeking worshippers (John 4:23-24). Jesus also told his disciples that eternal life is knowing the only true God through Jesus Christ his Son (John 17:3). We must anticipate that God is seeking us as we seek after him. Since it is his will that we all have eternal life, our growing in the knowledge of God is both available to us and acceptable to him.

God is eternal

Genesis chapter 1 tells us about the beginning of everything except the beginning of God. God was before this world and he will be beyond it. Moses wrote in a psalm, 'From everlasting to everlasting you are God' (Psalm 90:2). John wrote that God revealed himself as the 'Alpha and the Omega ... who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty'

(Revelation 1:8). Consideration of the eternal God sets our lives into proper perspective. Our years are like the flash of a camera in relation to the sun. Yet God beckons us to understand him!

God is unchanging

Everything about us changes. If you look at old photographs of yourself you may hide them in embarrassment when someone looks over your shoulder. Hopefully your wisdom has increased with your wizened looks, because then at least you can claim maturity! 'I the Lord do not change' (Malachi 3:6). Our feelings may change, but our Father does not. What we read about God doing in the Bible, he still does today. His intentions then are his intentions today. His attributes in the past are his attributes in the present. He beckons you to understand him.

God is holy

Not only is he holy, he lives in holiness, everything he does is holy and every thought he thinks is holy. Isaiah sees him as three times holy and Moses sang about his majestic holiness (Isaiah 6:3; Exodus 15:11). We are exhorted to 'worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness' (Psalm 29:2). We are also told that 'without holiness no-one will see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14). Any sin in our lives is a barrier to our understanding of God. We must be willing to dismantle these barriers.

God is our Father and not just a force

The Old Testament shows his dealings with the family of Israel. The New Testament shows his dealings with the Christian family. As our heavenly Father he is the source of our life. He guides us; he counsels us; he disciplines us; he loves us; he commands us; he gives to us; he lives with us.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about 'your Father, who sees what is done in secret' (Matthew 6:6, 18). Though he is unseen, he sees us. Though we don't know him, he knows us. The secret life we live with our heavenly Father will be the secret of success in our Christian walk. To be children of our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:45), we must take great care of the faith in our hearts.

Discussion Guide on 'God the Father'

Read Matthew 5:43 to 6:34.

1. Share *every* statement - at least 14, some duplication - about God the Father you can discover in this Bible reading.
Perhaps you can make two lists:
What is the Father like? ... What does He do?
2. "*The secret of successful Christian living is in developing a living relationship with this living God*".
If you have had a good relationship with your human father, share what made it good? Share things which helped the relationship develop. Discuss if, and how, these may apply to your new relationship with God.
3. In John 4:23-24 Jesus expresses that the Father is looking out for people who will worship Him in the right way.
Since Jesus also said that the greatest commandment ever given urges individuals to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" (Mark 12:30), describe - from both passages - the qualities you would expect to see in a Christian's relationship with God.

When my wife Brenda used to teach these classes she developed a simple phrase, in just a few words, that pointed towards how we should learn to view our Father God in heaven:

"Unchanging and infinite is holy Father".

4. Look up these verses for each of the key words. It is a good idea to use your own Bible if you have one. You will get to know your way around it given a bit of time. If you are in a group, some of you look up some passages while others look up others:

God the Father is *Unchanging* - Psalm 33:11
Malachi 3:6
Hebrews 6:17
James 1:17

God the Father is *Infinite* - Job 11:7-9
Psalm 90:2
Genesis 1:1
Psalm 139:7-10

Jeremiah 23:23-24
 Job 42:2
 Matthew 19:26
 Luke 1:37
 God the Father *Is* - Psalm 115:3
 Isaiah 40:18-28
 John 5:26
 Acts 17:24-25
 Romans 11:34
 Revelation 4:11
 Isaiah 66:1-2
 2 Timothy 2:13
 God the Father is *Holy* - Exodus 15:11
 Isaiah 6:3
 Isaiah 57:15
 Habakkuk 1:13
 Revelation 4:8
 God the Father is *Father* - Malachi 2:10
 Ephesians 4:6
 John 14, many verses!
 Matthew 5:43-6:34, many verses!

Because God is *unchanging* I can have confidence in Him. Because He is *infinite* I am in awe and wonder. Because God *IS* I am never alone. Because God is *Holy* I must be careful in my own life. Because God is *Father* I have my security in Him.

Why not finish your own sentence? "Because God the Father is ... I am ..."