



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

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The Christian Name for God

We continue to get confusing definitions of what a Christian is. It is not uncommon to hear some person make an off-the-wall statement and then back it up with, "because I am a Christian."

Dr. J. I. Packer has long been a trusted voice for evangelical Christianity. He says that a Christian is one who has God as Father. In his classic standard, *Knowing God*, he goes on to say that Father is the Christian name for God.

Some who deny or doubt God's revelation of himself in holy Scriptures claim that the concept of father is a projection of a social construction that evolved to sustain humanity in a more primitive time. The apostle Paul contradicts that with his assertion that it is the heavenly Father who gives every concept of fatherhood on earth.

(See Ephesians 3:14.) In fact, the whole story of history is about a father and son dynamic. Adam and Eve were the first son of God. From their original relationship, we learn the intent of creation and the nature of God's relationship with his human creation. Their relationship included at least the following tenets:

First, they lived conscious of the Father's presence. Humans were not designed to live without being conscious of the Father's presence. Life for us works only when we live

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with that awareness. Alienation, separation, and isolation are foreign to the life as designed by the Father. God has always been both a Father and Son and Spirit. He is by nature relational and so is his earthly son. Without his presence, we grope in a fog trying to decide how to survive, what life is about, and what God might want from us. After the first son sinned and lost awareness of God's presence, there was speculation and insecurity. Adam and Eve hid from God and were then placed outside the garden for which they were designed to live. This was the dilemma: Humans were not designed to live outside God's intimate presence, and the land was not designed to be managed by anyone but sons. Both the people and the earth suffered. Those with an orphan perspective will never cause the earth to flourish like sons can.

Second, sons live with awareness of abundant provision. There was plenty of fruit on plenty of trees in

the Garden of Eden. God oversupplies his sons. They have no reason to worry or fight for survival.

Third, sons embrace their calling as partners with God in his managing the earth. The Father has tied his success on earth to sons. He has chosen not to do for them what they were designed to do, but to do through them what he intended. Of course, he could have stopped the original process and simply fixed the problem caused by Adam and Eve, but he chose to use humans as his agents of redemption.

But they were infected with the **perspective of an orphan** and saw God more as a moral policeman than a Father.

In the biblical story, there was a second son: Israel. (See Exodus 4:22–23.) God called a people out of Egypt and referred to them as his son. Like with Adam and Eve

he gave them a way to have his presence: the tabernacle, the pillar of fire, and the cloud of glory. He provided everything they needed including manna from heaven and water from a rock. He fought through them to defeat the enemies in the land (think of it as an expanded garden) he had given them. But they were infected with the perspective of an orphan and saw God more as a moral policeman than a Father. They were enamored with the benefits they might get through obedience to his laws, but they didn't value the privilege of being his sons. Since orphan thinking leads to orphan living, they were taken out of their God-given land and displaced to Babylon—once again on the outside looking in.

We know that our joy is relative to our **consciousness of being related to God as sons.**

As the biblical story moves toward a climax, a third Son appears. It is the eternal Son of God who takes on human form. He is present with his own. He reveals what a

son does as well as how a Father treats sons. He never worries about provision. When he needs extra food to feed the crowds that have come to hear him, the Father provides. When he needs a donkey to ride in the triumphal parade, there is one available. When he needs a tomb for the weekend, it is provided. He made it very clear that he worked in concert with his Father. "The Father works, therefore I work." He told his disciples that if they had seen him, they had seen the Father. He lived as the ultimate Son, took our place of the rebel orphan as he died on the cross, and ascended to the right hand of the Father where he sent the Spirit of Adoption to live in believers so we could enjoy being related to God as sons. We can now live in conscious awareness of his intimate presence. We can live content with daily provisions, cautious that possessions offer a possible distraction from our partnership. We now engage our calling to be vessels of honor in the Father's house.

We know that our joy is relative to our consciousness of being related to God as sons. Nothing can take away our sense of well-being when we are living as sons

of God who is the sovereign Father of all. Knowing the Father quickens our ability to recognize fatherhood in others. I think this is how we understand Jesus' promise to Peter—that if you left all to follow him you would be given one hundredfold fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, houses, and lands along with eternal life and the persecutions that come from being so stable in an unstable world.

He knew he was loved by the One whose **love does not end and is always unconditional.**

All of us orphan-minded creatures have developed defense mechanisms in our efforts to survive. We must relinquish these and choose to relish only one credit. WE ARE LOVED BY JESUS WHO REVEALS THAT WE ARE LOVED BY THE FATHER. The author of the Gospel of John identified himself as “The one whom Jesus loved.” He could have claimed many flattering markers for his significance. He was one of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples.

He wrote several books that are included in the Bible. He raced Peter to the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning, etc. He chose only one thing. He knew he was loved by the One whose love does not end and is always unconditional.

The fatherhood of God is so vast that it will take eternity to plumb the depths of such a relationship. Coming to Christ is the beginning. Start there, but don't stop. Every day is another opportunity to know him more fully.



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