



Life with Our Father

the better life of knowing God

Part One The Father's Desire

Chapter 1

Through His Eyes

Bill hovered over me waving a pair of razor sharp scissors as he talked, "I keep trying to be good. Everything goes OK for a while but then I just seem to slip right back into that stuff again. I'm so tired of trying. It never seems to change. I think God is disgusted with me." Bill paused and sighed, "I might as well just give up."

I was getting my monthly haircut when Bill, the hair stylist, made his declaration of defeat. Moments earlier, after telling him I wanted an inch or so off the top, he asked me where I lived and what I did for a living. I never met Bill before that moment, having just popped into the first hair salon I saw on my walk through the local mall. I told him I ministered at a church about thirty miles up the road. Bill went on to tell me his story as a member of a large church and about his frustration trying to find the life he saw in other Christians.

Bill had a big problem, and little of it had to do with his cycle of trying and failing to be good. His problem was not his ability, or lack of ability, to be good. Bill's problem was his vision. He couldn't see! No, he wasn't a blind stylist. But he sure was blind.

As Bill snipped away at my hair I spoke quietly to him about how much he was loved by his heavenly Father and what our part was in response to God's great gift of life through Jesus Christ. As I shook off the hair clippings I suggested a Bible scripture he might like to read. (As it turned out, another of his customers had given him a modern translation of the Bible just a week earlier.) Bill gave me his business card as I left and asked me to stop by again, even if I didn't need a haircut. I never saw Bill again. The salon closed shortly after my visit and Bill disappeared.

Driving home from that divinely arranged haircutting appointment I thought a lot about Bill's frustration and about the very real presence of God's desire to have Bill understand His love. When I spoke to Bill about the heart of God, the Holy Spirit's passion overflowed in me toward him. As strong as Bill's desire was to know God, his heavenly Father's desire to have Bill know Him was much more intense.

This divine desire of God for us to know Him is the foundation of everything our God has done since the fall in the garden, and it is still at the center of His heart to this day. Through thousands of years up to the time of the Cross, He worked and invested to make a way for us to be with Him. And then, as a magnificent climactic gesture of that love, He went as far as the sacrifice of His only Son so that He could regain all of us as sons and daughters. The Apostle Paul wrote of this master plan in his letter to the Ephesians:

How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) Ephesians 1:3-5 (the Message)

Everyone has an image of God and what He is all about. This image comes to us from the teachings, experiences and observations we've been exposed to. Some people see God as a provider, others see Him as a protector, or as a distant mystical supreme being who created the earth and people as a weekend hobby project. And still there are others, like Bill, that see Him as a judge. If you surveyed a hundred people who confessed to be Christians, asking them who God is, what He is like and what He expects of them, you would likely end up with nearly as many different answers.

The way we view our heavenly Father is critical to every part of our life. The images we hold of Him will determine whether we gain or miss the great glory that is available to us now, in this life. God tells us in His Word that, "According to our faith (in Him) it shall be done unto us." To have faith in anyone we must know him or her. We must know their intent and their reliability. The same is true about our faith in our heavenly Father. If we are ever to gain anything from Him we must have faith in Him. To have faith in Him, true faith, we must get to know Him. Be encouraged, reader! You are already on your way to knowing Him better.

God was passionate for me to tell Bill that He loved him. And though I did tell him, a thick cloud of hopelessness still hung over him. My simple words of encouragement, though temporarily uplifting to his heart, were not enough. He was not languishing because God had abandoned him; but rather he was buried in a pit of desperation as a result of his own lack of vision. When we fail to see God properly, we end up living in needless cycles of fear and frustration. My people are being destroyed because they don't know me.
Hosea 4:6a (NLT)

Too often we lose sight of, and more often totally fail to understand, as did Bill, that the greatest desire of this all-powerful God is to be a Father to us. Bill was stuck in defeat because of a faulty image of God as being only his executioner. Indeed, when Bill looked at God he saw a judge. Then of course, when he looked honestly at his own life, he saw things that needed to be judged. The result for Bill was endless frustration in his daily cycle of measuring out all the good, bad, right, wrong, success and failure of his life in an attempt to feel justified. What an awful way to live. God doesn't want anyone to live such a life of frustration.

Bill's poor vision of God left him blind to the true full glorious work of Jesus Christ. Worse yet, no one ever led Bill to the God who is his Father. In his blinded condition, Bill couldn't see the gentleness and patience of his Father's heart. He didn't see that salvation as a spiritual growing-up process much like we grow up in our natural lives. He didn't know about the provision that his heavenly Father had put in the church to help him come to fullness and maturity, and he didn't see the true desire of God's heart, which is now, and always has been, to fellowship with us.

If we fail to understand what really motivates our heavenly Father, we are doomed to a life of frustration and failure. To gain the fullness He desires for us, and return to Him the desire of His own heart, we need only learn to see things through His eyes, to get His perspective.

Your perspective of life can mean the difference between absolute peace and absolute terror. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been so gripped by fear that it tore through your very soul? I mean the kind of fear that sweeps through you head-to-toe in dreadful waves wondering what might come next. Some two thousand years ago such fear seized the hearts of some very strong men crossing the Sea of Galilee. They survived their fateful journey. Along the way their encounter with the Son of God became forever etched into eternity's record of Christ's amazing miracles. But more important than the miracle they witnessed was the lesson they learned about their Father's perspective. Their journey is recorded in the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 4. Let's ride along with them for a distance.

"JOHN!! JAMES!! COME OVER HERE!!" shouted Peter.

"What's up?" questioned John, brushing by him on his way to the beach.

Peter replied, "Jesus wants the boats. We are crossing over."

"Now? It is nearly dark!" exclaimed John.

"Yes John. Now," commanded Peter.

John paused to think and answered, "OK. I'll get them ready, but hey Peter?"

Peter halted in the sand, "Yes John?"

"Do you think I can ride with the Master?" asked John with a grin.

"Yes John. Now go get the boats!" Peter replied watching as his young friend bounced away to the older disciples now gathering belongings for the journey.

"Hey James! Did you hear? I get to ride in the Master's boat!" boasted John.

"Who said?" demanded James. "I asked Peter and he said I could." retorted John proudly.

"Wait here," responded James.

"Where are you going?" John shouted off to James already jogging up the beach.

"I'm going to talk to Peter. I want to ride with Jesus too," James shouted over his shoulder back to John.

"PETER!! HEY PETER!!!" called James, now half out of breath.

Peter, who was caring for the pre-launch work needed for the lead boat, responded without looking up, "Yes James. What is it?"

"John said that you told him he could ride in the Master's boat," James spoke more quietly as he noticed Peter intent on his work.

"Yes James. I did," Peter responded knowing what was coming next.

"Can I be in His boat too?" asked James. "Yes, I suppose so," Peter responded without turning his gaze from the work at hand.

"Great!" James half shouted. "Hey did you see all those people listening to the Master teach today? How many do you think were there?" he asked.

Peter half sighed, weary from the long day, "I don't know, James, a lot."

"Peter?" James continued, "Those stories he told, about the farmer and the mustard seed, did you understand it all?" James asked quietly.

Peter paused from his work for the first time in their conversation and, looking out over the sea before them, replied, "No, James, not all of it. But I'm sure He will tell us what it means. Can you help your brother John get the boats ready?"

"Yes. I'm going now. Who are you riding with Peter?" asked an excited James.

"I don't know yet. Maybe with you guys," smiled Peter.

James raced away up the beach as Peter paused again just briefly to enjoy the zeal of his brother trotting away.

Just then, the Master, still pressed by the crowd, arrived at the shoreline. Peter was amazed. "How could a man go so long without rest?" he whispered to himself. Turning up the shoreline he cried, "EVERYONE IN THE BOATS! IT'S TIME TO GO!" Counting heads quickly he questioned, "Where are Andrew and Phillip?"

"We are here. What is it?" Philip asked just walking in from the other edge of the crowd with Andrew.

"Get Bartholomew and Thomas. Tell them to get into the boats. We are crossing over the lake," Peter said as he threw their last few belongings onto the second boat.

"Now Peter? It will be dark before we get across!" said a concerned Andrew.

"Yes. Now," Peter replied hurriedly as he drew up his tunic and moved back up the shoreline towards the Master's boat.

"OK. Whatever you say," agreed Andrew, "HEY!! EVERYONE INTO THE BOATS!! WE ARE LEAVING!!" he shouted waving his hands over his head, "PUSH OFF!! WE'RE CROSSING NOW!"

With all the boats on their way John was the first to speak, "What a day! Did you see the size of those crowds? It was amazing! How many do you think there were Peter?"

"More than I could count, they just kept coming," Peter replied breaking off a piece of bread.

Leaning to the rail of the boat, he continued, "Did you see how they hung on every word the Master spoke? They were still calling out to Him right up to the time He got into the boat. We should have stayed another day. I bet they would have all come back tomorrow! What do you think James?"

"I don't know," James rubbed his chin as he responded, "But I can't wait to see what happens next. The Master is becoming famous. Everyone wants to see Him. I think He could go far."

"Yes, I think He could become king of all Israel! I think we could march right into Jerusalem tomorrow and take over," Peter's voice rose with excitement as he spoke.

"YES! That's what I was thinking! Has He said anything yet? Do you think He will do it?" asked James as he pulled a piece of bread for himself and John.

"No James. He hasn't said anything about it to me," replied Peter, "But He must know how many people want to make Him King."

John froze in place for a moment staring out into the dark night in front of the boat. "Hey Peter, did you feel that?" he asked quietly.

"Feel what John?" Peter asked still thinking about a possible triumphant day to come in Jerusalem.

"That breeze," replied John with concern, "There it is again. Did you feel it?" he asked.

Peter set his bread aside and stood to his feet, "Yes. I felt it," he replied pulling his mantle up closer to his neck.

"Do you think a storm is coming?" questioned John.

"I don't know. It's hard to tell on this lake. The storms come so quickly here," Peter paused for a moment to listen to the growing winds. He turned to look off beyond the stern of the boat through the murky darkness to the boats that followed. "Better tell the others to be careful," he half whispered to himself." Just then a gust of wind swept across the deck. Peter spun around and exclaimed, "James, call out to the other boats and tell them to watch out for.....," caught in mid-sentence Peter grabbed for the rudder as the next gust of wind rocked the boat, "TOO LATE!! HERE IT COMES!" shouted Peter.

The disciples scrambled for anything to hold to. "It's a bad one Peter! I saw one like this a few years ago," someone shouted from Peter's left, the noise of the storm now too great to know who, "Six fishermen were drowned when they tried to..." the voice trailed off in the din of the wind and waves.

The storm raged on, growing with a fury by the minute. "What do we do?" cried John to Peter the fisherman.

"John! Take the rudder!" commanded Peter, "James! Grab the oars! AND EVERYONE HOLD ON!!" screamed Peter now fearing the worst himself. He had never seen one like this.

"Peter!! The waves!! They're coming over the sides!! We will be swamped!!" exclaimed John.

"Hold it into the wind John!" Peter cried back as loudly as he could but the sound of his words seemed only to be sucked away into the menacing gray waves now filling the boat.

"Peter!! Peter!! We're breaking up!" cried James.

"Row, James, row!" Peter shouted and motioned with his arms.

"We'll never make it!! The boat is nearly full!" came a voice that Peter thought was John's.

"Row!" Peter yelled, his mind now tinged with a growing fear that he had never known on any voyage through his years on the sea.

"Hang on!! Here comes a big one! Someone screamed from the stern as voices now mixed beyond recognition in the melee. Grab the buckets!!! We need to bail out the water!!" "What?" "The buckets!!" "I can't hear you!!" "The buckets!! Bail out the water!!" "But the rudder..." "Forget the rudder!! It's useless in this!! Bail!! Bail!!"

"Peter!! It's not working. We can't bail fast enough!! We're going down. We're going to drown!! What do we do?" "Jesus!! Master!! Where is He?"

"He's still asleep!" "What! I can't believe it! Doesn't He know what is happening? What is wrong with Him??? We are all going to die!! Doesn't He care about us?" "Jesus!! Master!! We are going to drown!! Don't you care?"

Quietly the Master arose to the deck of the boat. "Hush. Be still," He said to the winds. And just as suddenly as they came, they were gone. And then turning to His friends he asked, "Peter, James, John, why were you so easily alarmed? Do you still have no confidence in me?" Jesus quietly turned to his resting place as the disciples gathered the boat's equipment and supplies.

"Peter. The storm. It is gone! Vanished! This is unbelievable. He stopped a storm with only a few words. Who is this man?" whispered John.

"I saw it," replied Peter softly, "Did you see His eyes?"

"His eyes?" John asked as he slid up next to Peter on the deck. What about His eyes?"

"When he spoke to us.....his eyes.....they looked right through me when he asked us why we had awakened him," Peter said as he watched the Master slip back to his pillow, "What else could we have done? We were about to die," he said with quietness in his voice.

"Yes," Andrew spoke up from across the deck, "I felt it too. It seemed the storm meant nothing to him," Andrew said with amazement, "What does all this mean?"

"I don't know, John," Peter responded quietly, "I don't know."

Two Perspectives - Ours and His

How many times have you found yourself in just such circumstances? I know I have. Pressed by the storms of life, crushed under what seem to be fatal waves of tribulation, scared to death, racked by fear. Imagine yourself in that boat during that terrifying storm. What would you have done? It seems only reasonable to cry for help in such a situation. So why did Jesus rebuke the disciples for their lack of faith? Why was He disappointed? Doesn't God want us to cry out for help in times of trouble? The disciples were frightened. They simply called to Him for help. And anyhow, it was Jesus who set them onto the lake that evening. This was His fault. So why did they get rebuked?

To the disciples the storm meant sure death. They were convinced of impending doom. They did what was natural in that situation. They acted on their own understanding. They were simply evaluating the situation through their natural senses, seeing it through their own eyes, from their own perspective. But that was the problem - their perspective.

Jesus was on the same boat as the disciples. He was in the same storm. But unlike the disciples, He was resting comfortably. How could Jesus sleep through such danger? The answer is - perspective. To Him the storm held no danger because He knew that there was not a storm big enough to keep Him from fulfilling His Father's will. Jesus knew that He was not destined to perish in a storm. He knew that the Father had sent Him to give His life up on a cross. Jesus knew the Father perfectly and was resting in His Father's perspective.

The disciples relied on their own perspective of the storm and fell into fear followed by terror. We fear when we fail to see the events of life God's way. We fail to see it His way for one simple reason - we don't yet know Him. But there is great hope for us. He has made a way for us to know Him, and in that, a way to a much better life.

As humans, we tend to look through our own eyes at the workings and motives of God. This is a youthful, man-centered viewpoint. Proverbs 3:5 instructs us to

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." (KJV)

If we want to know God, to understand Him and His ways in our life, we must see through His eyes. We must have His understanding. Jesus was able to sleep through the storm because He understood the Father's love for not only the men in that boat, but for all creation - past, present and future. He was not going to die in that storm and He knew it. He knew that it was not His time. He had His Dad's perspective. And so, He just rested. Wow. Don't you wish you could live that way through the storms of your life? You can!

What does God want?

So why did these men receive a rebuke after such a terrifying ordeal? What did God expect from them?

The real issue, which they did not yet understand, was relationship. In their terror the disciples opened their mouths and accused Jesus of not caring. Look carefully again at what they asked Him:

Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?”

Mark 4:38 (NLT)

The accusation by the disciples that Jesus didn’t care if they drowned was quite an insult. His very presence on the earth was to lay down His life for them one day very soon on a rough wooden cross. Here He was, the Son of God come to die in humiliation, so that they could be with the heavenly Father forever, and they were accusing Him of not caring. Look at how Jesus responded to their accusation:

Getting to his feet, he told the wind, “Silence!” and the waves, “Quiet down!” They did it. The lake became smooth as glass. Then he said to his disciples, “Why can’t you trust me?”

Luke 8:24-25 (The Message)

The disciples had walked with Him and witnessed His love to others; His healings, His preaching, His tender care. And yet they could not believe that they were safe riding in the same boat with Him. They couldn’t believe that He loved them enough and was a good enough friend to keep them safe through that storm. And they went right ahead and said that to Him. They accused Him of not caring. It was this accusation that brought the gentle rebuke from Jesus. God never rebukes us for calling for help. But He is insulted when we accuse Him of not caring, and is offended when we don’t have faith in His love.

The gentle questioning rebuke, which Jesus spoke after calming the storm, had little to do with how great their faith was in His ability to control weather patterns; the issue there in that storm centered on relationship! He did not care much about their confidence in His almighty powers. He didn’t come to earth to wow us. He came to be the way home to the Father. The tone of disappointment in His question came as a result of their lack of confidence in His love for them. He counted them as His friends and they doubted Him. They had traveled with Him and personally witnessed His love to all mankind and yet they doubted His personal care of them.

Anyone can believe in the power of God. History and the Bible both record cases of godly and ungodly men and women who believed in and acknowledged the power of God. Cain, the son of Adam who murdered his brother; Pharaoh, the prince of Egypt who tortured God’s people; those who perished in Noah’s day, and even Satan himself, all acknowledged the power of God. God cares little about who believes or does not believe in His power. If that was all He wanted, He could simply pour out His miraculous supernatural power over the earth in a thousand different ways every day.

What God wants is relationship with His children. It was this desire for relationship (fellowship) with His friends that prompted Jesus to ask His disciples why they had no confidence in Him on that boat. He was disappointed because in spite of all of the compassion and love they had witnessed while traveling with Him, they still doubted His love for them.

Indeed, Jesus had not come to set up an earthly kingdom or to just display the Father’s supernatural power on the earth. In His own words, He came “to do the will of the Father.” The will of the Father had not changed from the beginning since the time of the first people, Adam and Eve, in the garden. The will of the Father is to be with His children, to be with you and me.

The disciples on the boat did not yet see Jesus as the way to the Father. They had no perception whatsoever of the Father’s ultimate desire of fellowship with them. If they had understood this divine desire they would have never feared the dangers of a simple storm. In their youthful ignorance they saw Jesus only in what He needed to do for them now - deliverance from a bad storm. They were like little children who cry when a parent fails to respond to a perceived danger as quickly as the child wishes. This is acceptable when children are small and have not yet learned to trust the love of their parents. But these men had been with Jesus and had witnessed His love and care first hand. In spite of this, they still had not come to understand the one issue that guaranteed their safety in that storm. They failed to see the heart-motive behind the power that would quiet that storm, which was their

heavenly Father's love for them. In years to follow these same men would grow in the knowledge of their God to the point they would not even fear death by torture. One day they would come to know personally what motivated the heart of their God. In time they would become pillars of the church and examples of how to walk in glorious relationship with the Father.

The greatest power in the universe works through the desire of our heavenly Father to be with you and me. In the disciples' failure to understand and have faith in this, "relationship based power," they offended the Lord and the Father, and plunged their own hearts into unnecessary fear. The disciples would have reached shore just as safely if they had believed in Jesus' love and simply rested with Him through the storm. Easier said than done? Yes maybe - but not impossible. If you will believe, all things are possible to you through Him. If you know the Father, you can rest through life's storms and you will reach the other shore safely because He will always respond to such confident relationship-based faith.

A proper and practical understanding of our Father's desire is foundational to every area of our life, from surviving the everyday storms of life to understanding life in the school of His Holy Spirit. We become more than victorious when we understand His motives. Lacking His perspective and failing to understand His heart condemns us to suffer in endless cycles of fear and frustration, and we miss the opportunity to rest in and enjoy His fellowship. This lack of understanding also robs Him of His ultimate desire, which is to be with us. Bill, the hair stylist, was caught in exactly this cycle of frustration, never really seeing how his heavenly Father really viewed him.

There is no need for you to tremble at the storms of life. There is no reason for you to fear failure, or loss, or even death. There is no reason to give up. He loves you dearly. He understands you completely. From before the foundation of the earth He knew you. He knows all of your weaknesses, all of your pains, all of your fears and all of your needs. You need never cry out questioning His care for you. He cares more than you can imagine. He has a plan for you - a good plan.

It won't be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ — eternal and glorious plans they are! — will have you put together and on your feet for good.

1 Peter 5:10 (The Message)

His greatest desire is to live with His children, to be with you. All of history is His love story showing how He moved and worked to bring us all to His house. We need never doubt our place in His hands! In Him we are more than just storm survivors, we are eternal children of the Most High God, born to rule, reign and live with Him. If you are willing to learn of His ways, you can fellowship with Him now in a great richness and enjoy the better life He destined for you.

So how do we get to know the Father? He is not visible. He is not physically here. But thanks be to God! He sent His Son Jesus Christ and made Himself known by Him.

he that hath seen me hath seen the Father (Jesus speaking)

John 14:9b (KJV)

Now we can look through His eyes. Now you and I can know the Father. We can see Him today!