

God the Father
Isaiah 40:21-31
Week 3

Opening

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

God of ages, you have called us to this place at this time with these people to look more closely at ancient words of faith. As we encounter this creed, send your Holy Spirit to guide our discussions. Give us a humble eagerness and imaginative thoughtfulness that our eyes might be opened anew to the power of the faith we profess. We pray in the name of the One whose passion and resurrection we anticipate this Lenten season, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

It may be a good practice to recite the Creed together each week as we are taking a closer look at each line. This week, we'll discuss the line **"I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."**

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Check-in questions

1. Think of a place in God's creation where you find yourself especially aware of his presence. It could be a particular location, a familiar sight, a work of art or the presence of another person. Why do you feel especially aware of God there?

God the Father

Throughout Scripture we find analogies that point to God's ability to reveal himself in ways we can understand, using illustrations we can comprehend. These scriptural images of God are easy to visualize and remember, yet on further reflection they convey important and profound truths concerning God.

The statement "God is our Father" means that God is like a human father. In other words, God is analogous to a father. In some ways he is like a human father, and in others he is not. There are genuine points of similarity as well as genuine points of dissimilarity. Like all analogies, the analogy of God as *Father* breaks down at points. However, it is still an extremely useful and vivid way of thinking of God.

The word *almighty* causes problems for some. It is helpful to consider several points. First, all power and authority in this world derive from God. Rulers, governments and Christian leaders all derive authority from God (Romans 13:1-2) and are responsible to him for the way they exercise their power. Second, things that seem impossible to us are perfectly possible for God. The angel who came to Mary reminded her of this truth (Luke 1:37). It is very easy for us to underestimate God; the creed reminds us that he is able to do far more than we imagine. Finally, *almighty* does not mean capricious. Scripture stresses the reliability of God; having made a promise, God stands by it (Psalm 19:7-10). The fact that he is almighty doesn't mean that he can or will suddenly change his mind about this. In his power and wisdom, God has chosen to achieve our salvation and has committed himself to us in this way.

Any idea of God as an impersonal being or force is immediately discounted when we speak of God as Father. To talk about God as our Father is to speak of his authority and care, but it is also to speak of his creativity. We are here because God brought us into being. Everything we see in the world was created by God and belongs to God. The universe reflects the wisdom, power and majesty of the God who brought us into being.

The doctrine of creation allows us to feel at home in the world. It reminds us that we, like the rest of creation, were fashioned by God. We are here because God wants us to be here. We are not alone but are in the very presence of the God who made and owns everything, and who is also a friend who knows us and cares for us. Behind the apparently faceless universe lies a person.

Read Isaiah 40:21-31

*Make it a point over the course of this series to read from a few different translations. Encourage those who may be reading from a different translation to share any differences they see.

Initial Reactions

1. What from this passage confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
3. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

Going Deeper

4. Identify specific questions posed in passage from Isaiah 40. How would you answer them?
5. This passage includes many word pictures, especially in verses 21-26. Taken as a whole, what do you think these word pictures are trying to convey about God's relationship with the created world?
6. What are some examples of what it means to "hope in the Lord" (v 31)?
7. The Apostles' Creed expresses belief in "God the Father almighty." Throughout this Scripture passage, where do you see evidence that God is almighty?

So What Questions

Still there is a limit to what can be known about God from nature. Christianity points to the biblical record culminating in Jesus Christ, especially his death and resurrection, as the supreme demonstration of the existence and character of God. The biblical witness to God both confirms and extends any knowledge of God available from nature. The ultimate demonstration of God's continuing concern for and involvement in his creation is his act of redemption in Jesus Christ. Creation is the theater in which the great drama of redemption is played out.

8. **If we didn't have access to the Bible, what would we know about God from the world around us?**

When the creed speaks of God, it means "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3). It is not dealing with some philosophical ideas of God but with the God who revealed himself in Scripture and supremely in Jesus Christ. It does not refer to some abstract idea about God but to the *living* and *personal* God whom Christians worship and adore. This enhances our approach to God in prayer.

9. **How is thinking of God as Father especially helpful in prayer?**

Most human fathers, despite their weaknesses and shortcomings, wish the best for their children. How much more does God desire the best for us! But every now and then a child may ask his or her father for something inappropriate. The father's failure to give this to the child does not mean that he did not hear the request or that he has ceased to care for the child. Rather, it means that his care and concern for the well-being of the child prevents him from fulfilling that request. He may give something else instead, something more helpful and appropriate. Perhaps we could say that God answers the prayers we *ought* to have prayed.

10. **When your prayers to your heavenly Father apparently go unanswered, how do you respond?**

First notice, how often Scripture compares God to a human mother. The love of God for his people is often compared to the love of a mother for her child (Isaiah 49:15; 66:13). Second, the analogy of God as Father also indicates *what human fathers ought to be like*. The same care,

compassion and commitment God shows toward us are meant to be reflected in the attitude of human fathers toward their children. Third, remember that the best way to think about God is to think about Jesus Christ. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Think of the love, care and kindness you see reflected in Jesus. That is what the love of God for you is like.

11. How would you help someone with very negative memories of his or her own father to appreciate the fatherhood of God?

Heidelberg Catechism Question

Each week, a question from the Heidelberg Catechism will be included with this study guide. The hope is that COB folks would take time to reflect on this question during the week as it gives more framework for the Creed as we study together.

Question 26.

What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?

Answer:

That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, I who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ the Son. I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world. God is able to do this because he is almighty God and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

For Now or Later

- Study Hebrews 12:1-13 to see how the loving discipline of God demonstrates his fatherhood.
- Study John 14:1-14 concerning Jesus' close identity with the Father.
- Make a point of taking time to gaze at the night sky, or if there is too much light in your area to see the stars, look at other aspects of your natural surroundings in the daytime. Even the most urban setting offers opportunities to see clouds, sunsets and green plants. What do these created things say to you about their Creator?

Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.