

## POWER OF PRAISE

by: Liz Wahl Andre'

“Knowing God as Father”

Many Christians have a distorted perception of the Father—the first Person of the trinity. The Father is the most misunderstood Person of the Godhead. We tend to characterize the heavenly Father with the attributes of our earthly fathers or those who were father-figures in our growing-up years. It is easy to trust Jesus because He stood up for the downtrodden masses, faced down the religious bullies with the word of truth spoken in authority, and in the end, He willingly died a horrendously cruel death on the cross for us. Jesus is often viewed as compassionate, meek and merciful, and the Father as stern, unyielding and implacable. Where there has been abuse by an authority figure, the resulting fear, anger and rebellion is projected upon the Supreme Authority—Father God. If our fathers were harsh, critical and abusive, our view of the Father would be tainted, perceiving Him as angry, condemning and impossible to please. This false image of Father God sets one up for a lifetime of striving and performing—grasping for achievement in hopes of gaining the elusive approval that was not given to a heartbroken child. A wrong concept of the Father provokes jealousy, competitiveness, and “doing the right things for the wrong reason.” Instead of resting in the assurance of the Father’s unconditional love, the believer with these childhood wounds tries to *earn* the acceptance of the Father. Yet the Father beckons us to draw near to Him: ***“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3).***

If our Fathers were passive and absent, we could easily perceive Father God as impersonal and unconcerned about our lives. Even fathers who are physically present at home can be “absent,”—consumed with work, watching television, hidden behind a newspaper, computer or book—withholding the time and attention their children need. While we could not capture the looks, hugs and nods of approval that we craved from our fathers, Father God was always watching us, taking delight in the things that we made with our hands. Although our imperfect earthly fathers have failed us, our Heavenly Father will never fail us. He will do

everything short of circumventing our free will to draw us in so that we may receive His salvation and everlasting life.

Those who were blessed with an earthly father who was a good provider and protector, a wise teacher, fair disciplinarian, and a nurturer of his children have an easier time relating to their heavenly Father as a good, involved, wise, loving, and just God.

Many believe that God is an angry judge, kept only from squashing people by a merciful Jesus, who is holding Him at bay. This is not what scripture teaches. Jesus replied to Philip who asked Him to show them the Father: ***“Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father, so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?” (John 14:9-10)*** Jesus’ actions and words came from the Father upon whom He totally depended (John 14:10). Jesus portrayed the heart of the Father to everyone He met. And what is the heart of the Father? ***“The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards 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 pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him, for He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103: 8-14).***

There is only one way for our hearts find rest and that Way is found by salvation through Jesus Christ, redeeming us to the Father. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Even when we were sinners and enemies of God, He demonstrated His love for us by sending His Son to die for us and pay the price for our sins (Romans 5: 8-10). The love of God is unconditional and eternal—we can never “earn” it. We can only receive it gratefully, allowing His love to heal us and have its full expression through us towards others. A Pharisee came to test Jesus and asked Him which is the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like

it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22: 35-40). We must first receive the love of the Father or we have nothing to give Him or others. ***“We love Him because He first loved us” (1John 4:19).*** We do not have to strive in prayer or good works to earn the Father’s love; He gives His love lavishly and freely. It is His love that saves, heals all of our wounds and makes us whole.

***“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him.” –Jesus (Matthew7:11)***