

# Do I Have an Accurate Perception of My Father?

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Let me start by asking a very profound question. What is your perception of God Almighty, the Most High, our heavenly Father? What is your perception of Him, how do you view Him, what is your image of Him? Einstein's perception of God Almighty was, he believed in God and he believed He was Creator of the universe. But Einstein believed that He wound up the clock, so to speak, in creating the universe, put it on a shelf and then walked away and just left it alone. That was his view of God Almighty.

The Unitarian churches' view—you see one on a corner every so often—is that He exists in all things, all humans, all plants, all animals, He exists in the sun, the stars and the earth itself. Their view is a fuzzy image of God that He is this amorphous blob that exists in everything that we see.

Our perception of God obviously has been influenced by our parents, especially our father. For example, if we had a father who was harsh or overbearing or took out his frustrations or took out his anger upon his children, then if we grew up in such an environment that would color our perception of God—it would have to. Those who might have had a father who was distant or unloving or uncaring would tend to label God with that—paint God with that brush. In fact, Winston Churchill quoted the following:

“My father was like God; he wasn't around much.”

You see how the image of his father colored the image of God Almighty. Of course, then some sadly have never had a father. Subsequently, they have a void in that area. Maybe a nebulous image of God Almighty. Like myself and my brother, we had a father who was very powerful and instilled fear in us if we crossed the line. So, when we came into the church, fearing to disobey Yehovah came easy; that was just the way we grew up. Understanding God Almighty's love for us—not so much because of the experience we had growing up.

Those like my wife, who had a father who was loving, kind, affectionate and gentle, it was easier for her to view God Almighty in that same way. So, when we are called and we start to learn about our Creator, the example of our physical fathers plays into that and influences us.

In addition, for those who were part of the Worldwide Church of God which are probably the majority of those in Pacific, certainly when we came into the church in the '60's and '70's there was an emphasis on the obedience to the commandments. There was much talk about the consequences of disobedience. The wrath of God Almighty, ruling with a rod of iron and very quick to pull the trigger as far as punishment goes. That greatly influenced, at least coming into the church, our perception of God.

Let me give you an example. In the 1990's I used to do a lot of Y.O.U. Bible studies and I was doing a study on God Almighty and trying to teach these teenagers about Him. One young boy who was about 13 or 14 came up and in front of everybody in the study he says, "My dad tells me that God is waiting to destroy sinners. You talk about this cool old guy who loves His children. I'm confused". He was right to be confused because he was hearing two different things about the God who he is supposed to worship.

Then in addition to all of the above, look at what has happened to the church over the last 25 years, the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God, the subsequent splits, gossip and fighting. That fact has influenced many people's perceptions of God Almighty. People ask, where is God in all of this? Or how can this be God's church? Why is He allowing this to happen to the church? That has colored their perception of God Almighty.

Then on top of all of that, we have our own personal trials and those trials, if we're not careful, can change our view and perception and image of our spiritual Father. I think we've all said when we've gone through a difficult trial, we can say "God, how can you let this happen to me, why are you doing this?" With the implication that He is this mean old God out to get me.

Today we have allowed our personal events to influence our perception of our Father. We're all guilty of that. Sadly, for many, as a result of that, their faith has been damaged and they are not as close to their Father as maybe they should be. Their image of the Almighty has changed or their image of the Almighty was never accurate to begin with. So again, I ask the question, is my image of my spiritual Father real? What is my image of God Almighty? Is it fixed, is it sure or is it kind of fuzzy and changeable? Does my perception of my Father change depending on what is happening to me at any moment time? If we're having a good day, God is good, God is wonderful. If we're having a bad day, He's out to get me, He wants to punish me.

So, let me ask another question:

"If next week you found out that you had terminal cancer and only a few months to live, how would that change your perception of God Almighty?"

Just log that in your mind and think about that. If I got that kind of news, would that change my image of my spiritual Father? The real question is, does God recognize my perception of Him? Does God recognize the perception I have of Him? He is fixed, He is real, here's my perception, can He recognize my perception? Is my perception accurate or does it even come close to who He really is? Of course, this subject is of profound importance to us, especially in the days in which we live.

The title of the sermon today—what we're going to cover—is:

Do I have an Accurate Perception of My Father?

We'll cover this in four points. In the first one we need to establish some basic understanding that we all know, but is good to review.

## **1. We have to realize that our Father and His Son do not change.**

Thankfully they don't change. They are the only constant in the universe, unlike even the speed of light. They are the only constant that there is. Let's go to Malachi 3:6 and read the first part of that verse. These are memory scriptures if we ever get into a trial, these are scriptures we want to remember. God Almighty is speaking and being quoted and we can be thankful that this is the case.

**Malachi 3:6** *For I am the LORD, I change not;* (KJV)

He does not change. Does His Son change? Let's go to Hebrews 13:8. The Son is just like the Father; they have the same nature, the same character, the same Spirit.

**Hebrews 13:8** *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.* (KJV)

So, we have the Father and His Son, thankfully, who never, ever change and we can count on that. Since our Father and His Son don't change, it's our duty our responsibility to know them as they really are. Shame on us if we don't seek to know them as they really are. If we ask our Father to reveal Himself more and more, He will answer. He has certainly answered all of us in the last several years. So, the first point, the Father and the Son do not change.

The second point, as background and a basic foundation of what we're talking about:

## **2. The true understanding of our Father and His Son is spiritually revealed.**

It's not a matter of physical knowledge, it's not a matter of looking into books. It's not a matter of how many hours we spend studying. It's a matter of whether or not our Father opens our minds to allow us to see Him and His Son as they really are. Let's go to Luke 10:21-22. I'll read this out of the New King James and as usual, everything will be out of the King James unless otherwise noted.

**Luke 10:21** *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes [talking about the disciples, the apostles and us by extension]. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.*

*22) All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."* (NKJV)

It's a spiritual revelation to open our minds up through the linkage of the Holy Spirit, having God's Spirit in us and then we can begin to understand who He really is. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 2:11 and 14. Spiritual revelation is the key.

**1 Corinthians 2:11** *For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? [Yes, we do. There is a separate spirit in each one of us that makes us different from the animal kingdom] even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God. (KJV)*

Indicating the Spirit of God does and can reveal it to us. Verse 14.

*14) But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they [meaning the things of God] are spiritually discerned. (KJV)*

*Spiritually understood*, as the Greek means, or *spiritually determined*. It's not a matter of IQ, it's not a matter of how fast we read or comprehend, it's a *spiritual discernment*. Let's go to Psalm 73 and we'll read the first 25 verses of this because it shows us the progression of a wrong view into a right view and it's a spiritual thing. This is a Psalm of Asaph.

**Psalms 73:1** *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*  
2) *But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had wellnigh slipped.*  
3) *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*  
4) *For there are no bands [the Hebrew means pain, there's no pain, meaning they don't suffer like the rest of us] in their death: but their strength is firm.*  
5) *They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.*  
6) *Therefore, pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.*  
7) *Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.*  
8) *They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.*  
9) *They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.*  
10) *Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. (KJV)*

If this doesn't describe the world today, as Gordon mentioned in the sermonette, I don't know what does. It just seems like the wealth and prosperity and they blaspheme against God and embrace all manner of perversion.

11) *And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*  
12) *Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.*

13) *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.*  
(KJV)

Does that sound like us sometimes? What's the use? Why try to obey when nothing is working out for me? Or God is punishing me or whatever our excuse is for the moment.

14) *For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*  
15) *If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.*  
16) *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;* (KJV)

We see this person is not walking along the right path. Getting confused, looking at the world and saying, "I wish I could be like that or have that happen to me." This person is really confused spiritually and that lasted until verse 17.

17) *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.* (KJV)

So, Asaph saw the corruption of Solomon after he went astray and the corruption in his kingship. We also believe that Asaph lived after Solomon. So, he saw the corruption of the new kings of Judah and he had a wrong perception of how life worked until he went directly to God Almighty—to Yehovah—to learn, to be taught, to have the truth revealed to him. Notice the difference beginning in verse 18.

18) *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.*  
19) *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.*  
20) *As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*  
21) *Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.*  
22) *So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*  
23) *Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.* (KJV)

Through his waywardness, and the way he viewed things, God didn't reject him and He stayed with him.

24) *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*  
25) *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* (KJV)

What a change, and after his revelation—his perception of life, of God Almighty—changed radically. Our understanding of God Almighty and His ways must be revealed by Him and by His Son. That being the case, being close to Him and close to His Son should be our constant desire and our first priority. Personally, in the last several years, my perspective of God Almighty, of Yehovah, has profoundly changed. With the

revelation of just who is the God of the Old Testament—it has changed my study life, my prayer life, my meditation and how I think and I know I speak for all of you it has changed our view of God Almighty dramatically.

The fact is, over time our picture, our perception, our image of God, should mature as we have more revelation from Him and as we draw closer to Him and study to understand Him more, as He reveals the truth about Himself. Our image should change in that regard and become clearer and more in focus. A true focused image of God is something that is revealed by Him and He does so to us through prayer, through study, through meditation and through experience and through our asking, wanting, striving to be close to Him and to know who He is and who His Son is.

That leads to the third point.

### **3. Because the Father and the Son do not change, our image of Him must not change.**

Being constant and being fixed. As I just said, our image of God should evolve, yes. As we get to know Him better and we draw closer to Him over time. That's not what I'm talking about. Our image of God should not change because our circumstances change. That's the key. We should not allow what is happening to us or in the world or in the church or in our family or with our health—or whatever it might be—we can't allow all of that to change our image of our Father.

Let me give you three examples under this third point of where people's image of God changed because their circumstances changed. These aren't good examples. These are there for our instruction and for our learning. The most obvious:

#### **3A. Israel's image of God changed dramatically.**

Let's go to Exodus 15 and read the first 13 verses. We are breaking into the account where Israel has come through the Red Sea and everything has worked out. The Egyptians are all dead, the Sea swallowed them up and life is good. Their enemy, their oppressor has just been wiped off the face of the earth.

**Exodus 15:1** *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*

*2) The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

*3) The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. (KJV)*

Isn't that interesting—God Almighty has a name and it is Yehovah.

*4) Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea.*

- 5) *The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.*  
6) *Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. (KJV)*

Continuing in verse 11) ...

- 11) *Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*  
12) *Thou stretched out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them.*  
13) *Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. (KJV)*

So, Israel at this moment in time had a correct image of Yehovah. They understood it to the point they were singing praises to Him of what He had just done. Now, let's go to Exodus 16 and look at the change just a few weeks later. We'll read the first three verses and then verse 8.

**Exodus 16:1** *And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. (KJV)*

The incident at the Red Sea is about two weeks in their rear-view mirror.

- 2) *And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:*  
3) *And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. (KJV)*

What has changed between then and two weeks earlier? They were hungry. Their bellies were empty

8) *And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we [referring to himself and Aaron]? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD. (KJV)*

We see that continued on through the forty years in the wilderness. Gripping, complaining, moaning, blaming God, ready to stone Moses and Aaron at the slightest inconvenience. Israel's perception and image radically changed in a very, very short time because of their circumstances. Yet, all this time Yehovah did not change. Now let's look at a second example of Joshua.

### **3B. Joshua's image of Yehovah changed.**

Let's go to Numbers 13:1; we'll just through Numbers 13. Israel is coming up to the Promised Land that they had been promised and you would think they would have been eager to go after all that God Almighty has done for them.

**Numbers 13:1** *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,  
2) Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. (KJV)*

*Continuing in verse 25) ...*

*25) And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.  
26) And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.  
27) And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.  
28) Nevertheless, the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. [That's a clan of giants.]  
29) The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.  
30) And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.  
31) But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.  
32) And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.  
33) And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. (KJV)*

Notice chapter 14:1.

**Numbers 14:1** *And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.  
2) And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! (KJV)*



Of course, Israel once again has a wrong perception of God Almighty because of their circumstances. Notice what Joshua says in verse 6.

*6) And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:*

*7) And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.*

*8) If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us [He will do it]; a land which floweth with milk and honey.*

*9) Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. (KJV)*

We see beginning in verse 6, Joshua had a true image of God Almighty. He understood that He was in control and would save them. Now let's go to Joshua 7 and read the first seven verses. Here we are, 40 years after Israel's entry into the Promised Land. This is after the destruction of Jericho—the miracle of the walls falling down and all of that. Notice Joshua's attitude and how it changed.

**Joshua 7:1** *But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: (KJV)*

This was a *dedicated thing*, the Hebrew means “dedicated”—that all of the booty was *dedicated* to destruction. They were not supposed to keep any of it, but destroy it all.

*1 continued) ...for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: (KJV)*

In other words, he took a portion of the spoils of the city of Jericho, which God commanded to be destroyed. So he had violated God's order.

*1 continued) ... and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.*

*2) And Joshua [at this point he didn't know what Achan had done, that he taken some of the booty and hidden it in his tent] sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. (KJV)*

Ai was a little town, insignificant.

*3) And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labor thither; for they are but few.*

*4) So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.*

*5) And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down [of the sun]: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. (KJV)*

Notice Joshua's reaction after all he had been through.

*6) And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.*

*7) And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! (KJV)*

Joshua's image of Yehovah had changed, just like Israel's, because his circumstances changed. The men of Ai all of a sudden put to rout the Israelites; conditions had changed. He allowed that to affect his vision, his image of God Almighty. Just as an aside, why do you think Yehovah had Ancient Israel remove all the idols and break them up in pieces? So that there would be no false images of Him. At this point, Joshua had a false image. Our Father wants us to have a true picture of who He is, that's why we are to have no idols at all. We can't let anything alter our true perception of God Almighty.

Let's look at a third one.

### **3C. Peter's image of Christ changed dramatically.**

Peter, of all the disciples, had the correct image of God sooner than the rest of them. Let's go to Matthew 16:13-17. It's a revelation and Peter had a revelation before the rest of them of who Christ actually was.

**Matthew 16:13** *When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

*14) And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

*15) He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

*16) And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

*17) And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (KJV)*

It's a spiritual revelation. Peter, at this point, had a true and perfect picture of Jesus Christ. But, how long did that last? His image changed when circumstances changed. Christ was their Master, they were following along and having Him teaching them and performing miracles, but then when He was taken in as a common criminal, things

dramatically changed. Let's go to Mark 14:66-72. Christ had been taken captive at this point.

**Mark 14:66** *And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest:*

*67) And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.*

*68) But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.*

*69) And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them.*

*70) And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaeen, and thy speech agreeth thereto. (KJV)*

It would be like somebody with a deep southern accent talking to us here and we would know where they were from.

*71) But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.*

*72) And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept. (KJV)*

Of course, he did. Peter's perception of Jesus Christ—the one he had spent 3½ years with, changed dramatically and very quickly because of circumstances. What was going on around him. He knew that Jesus was the Son of the living God. Then all of a sudden when He's dragged around like a common criminal and slapped and beaten and all of that, and accused, Peter allowed the circumstances to change his image of the Man that he had been with for 3½ years.

So that all three of these—Israel, Joshua and Peter—their perception changed when their circumstances changed and when they were under pressure. Our circumstances are going to change in the future and we are going to be under greater pressure in the future and we cannot allow that to happen. Satan is right there waiting and once we have doubts, he starts drilling in and “we're off to the races”, as they say. Let's go to James 1:5-8. This is a condemnation of those who do not have a fixed, secure image of God Almighty and His Son. We're going to read this out of the New Living Translation.

**James 1:5** *If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.*

*6) But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.*

*7) Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.*

*8) Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do. (NLT)*

We've seen examples of that, where Israel wanted to go back to Egypt. "We love the food, we love the flesh pots, we could eat to the full" and on and on. Over the years I've known several brethren who allowed their image of their Father to change to their determinant. When my wife and I were in Boston we had a family there who lost everything in a home fire. I know Jack and Marie experienced that a number of years ago. The problem was they didn't have any insurance because they had counseled with a minister who told them that bad things don't happen to God's people. As long as you are right with God, God's going to take care of your home and you don't have to have insurance. That's not what the Bible says but that is what was taught too often back then. It's even taught in Protestant religions today—of religion and prosperity. They had this fire destroy the whole house and the father became so angry that they just walked out of the church. Angry at the ministry, angry at the church and they just left. They didn't have a fixed image of God—thinking God is on His throne, He is in control, He allowed this to happen, there must be a reason for it, maybe there is something He wants us to learn from this. That went out the window and they left.

Back then, at this time too, there was a super deacon who was a good friend of mine. We had super deacons back in those days—I was not one of them. When he was not ordained an elder, and he was expecting to be, he left the church over that. He was angry at God, he was angry at the ministry, he was angry at whoever made the choice to ordain somebody over him. He was never the same after that moment. It took him a few months but he left the church over it. His whole countenance changed, his demeanor changed, his smile changed—or disappeared. Not thinking, okay God you're in charge and maybe I need to learn some more lessons before I become an Elder, if I ever do.

Then out here in this area, a number of years ago—a couple of decades actually—a woman found out that she had terminal cancer. I called her up—we were in Yakima and this was down in this area—and after at time I called to check on her and see how she was doing, knowing she was being taken care of by the local pastor. She was angry. She said, "I'm dying". Ok, we all have to die once. She said, "I'm dying and I'm supposed to live until Christ returns". That's what she had been taught—that we were all going to be here until Christ returned. She had set her sights on that and looked to God for that. When God didn't meet her expectations, God was the bad guy. I don't know how God is going to sort that one out.

The point is, we cannot let what other people do change our image of our Father. We cannot let our circumstances dictate our image of our Father.

The fourth and last point.

#### **4. We must have a true, unshakable, fixed image of our Father and His Son.**

We have to come to the point where we have a true, unshakable, fixed image of our Father and His Son. So that no matter what happens to us, we are not shaken. No matter what circumstances, even until death, our image of our Father is not shaken. Let me give you three examples of a true, fixed image of Yehovah that people had under very, very trying circumstances.

#### **4A. Hezekiah.**

Last time we talked at length about Hezekiah so we're not going to spend a whole lot of time about that. You remember that Sennacherib, king of Assyria came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took every one of them. By that time Assyria had become the major power of the area and conquered nation after nation after nation—all pagan nations with their pagan gods. So then Sennacherib sent his general to surround Jerusalem with troops and as you remember, the general stood at the foot of the city wall and spoke in Hebrew and said:

“Don't let Hezekiah fool you, because he won't be able to deliver you. Don't let Hezekiah make you trust in Yehovah because Yehovah is not going to deliver you either.”

He makes the point:

“Have any of the gods of any of the other nations that we have conquered and destroyed stopped us from taking them captive and killing them?”

He said to surrender to the king of Assyria and we will treat you well. So based on what they saw and what they knew, there was no hope on a human perspective. For Hezekiah, for all the people of Jerusalem, those standing on the wall, there was no hope. Remember what we're told to do? *Walk by faith and not by sight*—2 Corinthians 5:7. That's what we have to do.

So, Hezekiah has a problem and what does he do? God is watching him. Let's go to Isaiah 37 and we'll skip through it quickly because you know the outcome but it's always good to remind ourselves of this. We'll read verse 1 just to set the stage and then we're going to read verses 15-23 and then 33-35.

**Isaiah 37:1** *And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. (KJV)*

*Continuing in Verse 15) ...*

*15) And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying ... (KJV)*

Notice that despite this life and death situation, notice his perception of Yehovah.

16) *O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. (KJV)*

His vision totally superseded what the general of Assyria was making claims about. Hezekiah had an accurate, true perception of Yehovah.

17) *Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God.*

18) *Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries,*

19) *And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.*

20) *Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only. (KJV)*

Then apparently, immediately, in verse 21.

21) *Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria:*

22) *This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn [this tiny nation of Israel, this tiny town relatively speaking, of Jerusalem, is laughing you to scorn]; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.*

23) *Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. (KJV)*

Continuing in verse 33) ...

33) *Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it.*

34) *By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD.*

35) *For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. (KJV)*

As we know, our Father sent an angel and killed 185,000 soldiers. Sennacherib packed up, went back to Nineveh and when he was there, his two sons killed him—stabbed him to death. It's a historical fact that the Assyrian chronicles say that Sennacherib came back home of his own volition. He made the decision to leave Judah and come back. Of course, they are papering over the problem. The chronicles of the surrounding nations say that a great plague hit his army and killed all of his soldiers.

Despite their dire circumstances, Hezekiah's perception of the Almighty did not change. What an example for us. When we get into dire circumstances, go back and read this. Hezekiah did not change because of circumstances; he did not change his vision of the Almighty and we need to hold onto that.

A second, very obvious example:

#### **4B. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.**

We can be turning to Daniel 3; the context is that Nebuchadnezzar made an image 90 feet high and commanded everybody to worship this idol when a certain tune was played and these three boys—in their late teens or early 20's—refused. So then Nebuchadnezzar heated up a furnace and they stand before the furnace and they are facing the king. I'm going to read this out of the NIV.

**Daniel 3:17** *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace [they are holding out the hope that maybe they won't be], the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. (NIV)*

This is pretty brazen for these three young boys who he had promoted into this position.

18) *But even if he does not [they allow for the fact that they might die; God may not intervene], we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. "*

19) *Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed [he had promoted them and they were his pets so to speak]. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual*

20) *and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.*

21) *So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.*

22) *The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,*

23) *and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.*

24) *Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."*

25) *He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." (NIV)*

I'm reading out of the NIV—the King James, the New King James and Webster's say *Son of God*.

26) *Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the most High God*

[now his tone is changing a little bit], *come out! Come here!*” So, *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,*  
27) *and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.*

28) *Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. (NIV)*

Who is the only true God? The boys’ situation had changed from being in a preferred position of leadership to being thrown into a fire and despite that, facing the losing of their lives—burning alive, I can’t imagine a worse death—their image of God Almighty did not change despite the circumstances.

The third is closer to home. I’ve mentioned this lady whom I greatly admired before, but in this context, I would like to mention her again because I would frankly like her to be remembered.

#### **4C. Her name is Betty Tomich (she’s dead now).**

She was a deaconess in the Midland, Michigan church back in the Worldwide days in the ’60’s, when I came into the church. I was in the Air Force 250 miles away and I would drive down every Sabbath and more often than not would stay at their home. She always had a place, always had the food, she and her husband were just marvelous hosts and made me feel very welcome. I was a “newbie” coming into the church and facing a Court Marshall in the military. I got to know her over the course of a year before I got out and I never heard her utter a negative word about anybody. I never heard her criticize anybody, she was always smiling, happy and cooperative and did everything she could to serve the church.

In the mid ’70’s she had a terminal brain tumor. My brother and I—I was traveling all over the country—I took time to divert, picked up my brother and we went and visited her in her last days. All the shutters were closed, it was dark in there and I went into her bedroom—the light bothered her greatly. You could recognize her but it was difficult because the tumor had broken through and swallowed this side of her head. We went there to cheer her up but, as usual, the opposite thing happened. We started talking and she quietly, calmly and happily was trusting in God Almighty to heal her. She said, I’m in God’s hands and He is going to take care of me no matter what and then turned the conversation onto us and asked how we were doing. She tried to get the conversation off of herself and onto us.

Just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego she was facing certain death unless God Almighty intervened. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, they said “If God chooses not to intervene then we’re still not going to worship this idol.” For her, she said



“If God chooses not to heal me, I’m perfectly fine with that. I’ll be in God’s Kingdom and that’s what I want, that’s my goal.” During this whole time, she could have said “Woe is me.” She had three children, a nice home and a good husband. She could be wailing and moaning like this other woman who was mad at God because she was going to die. She did none of that because her image of her Father didn’t waiver. She trusted in Him and she died very peacefully a few days later. It was a week or two after we left. She will be in God’s Kingdom.

We’ve seen three examples of our brethren having a true, fixed, stable image of their Father and Jesus Christ in very, very difficult circumstances. So let’s close now.

Again, we come back to the question:

*Does our perception of God Almighty change, based on what we’re going through at any given moment in time?*

As we’ve seen, that can happen because of circumstances in our lives, because of what men do to us or what God Almighty allows to happen to us. During all of these trials and everything that we’ve read in the Bible up to this point, our Father never changed. His Son never changed. During all of the trials that we’ve read about, during all of our trials, all the trials in the church over the years, They have never changed. Notice James 1:17, I’ll read this out of the NIV. This is something we cannot forget. Even a trial can be a gift because it causes us to bear Godly fruit.

**James 1:17** *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (NIV)*

He does not change. If you’ve ever watched a sun dial or your own shadow on the ground, our shadow changes minute by minute. What we’re being told here is our Father is not like a shifting shadow. He does not change minute by minute. And our Father’s nature—who He is—never changes. Let’s go to Matthew 7:7 and I’ll read through to verse 11. Jesus is speaking and it applies to us today, given the evil that is going on in our world today. We watch the news every night and there’s another mass shooting and people exalting perversion of every kind and it’s enough to make you sick.

**Matthew 7:7** *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:*

*8) For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (KJV)*

Now He draws an analogy for those of you who are parents and have been in this position—but totally understandable to all people.

*9) Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?*

*10) Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?*

*11) If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, [here's the point] how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (KJV)*

This is the reality of our Father. If we ask:

“Show me more about You and Your Son, open my mind up to see what my failures are and my shortcomings, my sins, so I can get rid of them and be more like You.”

Do you think our Father would not answer those questions? Or, if we're in a situation, like Betty Tomich was or Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, if we are having a life-threatening trial and we ask like they said—*God can surely deliver us, but He may choose not to, but either way, we're not going to fall down and worship your image, or either way we're not going back into the world or either way we're not going to turn our back on you.*

So, we see that this is the reality of our Father. Every good and every perfect gift, He gives to us. It may not be what we want. In Betty Tomich's case, He allowed her to die, but long term what was the benefit? She'll have eternal life in the Kingdom of God, that's all. She trusted in that and all of us can also. We can't let our perception of our Father be determined by what is happening to us. We face terrible times ahead. We face loss, evil, all kinds of things that will come our way. We can't let those circumstances change our perception of Who God Almighty is in our eyes. Therefore, our eyes should be firmly fixed on the living God.

*The real, true, unchangeable God and His unchangeable Son.*