



Introduction

With summer twilight casting a feather-soft glow on my daughter's drooping eyes, I sing her toward dreamland, each word shushed in an envelope of whispers.

O Lord, You're beautiful.
Your face is all I seek.
For when Your eyes are on this child,
Your grace abounds to me.¹

I kiss her forehead and watch her gentle smile fade. Tight wrinkles dig into her brow, signaling a question at the crossroads of her mind. "Daddy?" she asks, her eyes fluttering open. "What does God look like?"

¹ Lyrics by Keith Green. © Birdwing Music/BMG Songs. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

What a question! How can I possibly answer it? A hundred duties await my attention. Every night brings a tug-of-war of fatherly responsibilities. On one side, the busy work of bills and fix-it projects pull like gargantuan gods, but they must wait for every juvenile head to finally nestle in its pillow. On the other side, the peaceful solitude of gentle lullabies and butterfly kisses pull back, nightly reveries with my children that transcend time. Tonight my daughter wins the battle and I tuck her covers in at the sides as I try to think of an answer that will make sense to her world of concrete realities.

“Jesus told us that God is spirit,” I begin. “We can’t see our heavenly Father with our eyes, but we can sort of see Him by watching other people.”

“Like who?”

“Well, that’s an easy one. Remember what Jesus said? ‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father.’ Jesus is full of truth, mercy, and love. So is God the Father. If we watch Jesus, we’ll know what God the Father is like.”

“But Jesus isn’t here anymore. I can’t watch Him.”

I stroke her hair, aware of her lovely lack of abstract thought. She’s right. Jesus isn’t here anymore. Though I could explain the theological truth of “Christ in us,” the indwelling Holy Spirit who reveals the character of God to our hearts and minds, such a nebulous concept is surely out of her reach. There no longer walks a flesh and blood Savior who fills our eyes with the Father’s glory. At this moment I fully realize the gravity of my position in her sight, and its burden squeezes my chest. Dare I tell her my thoughts?

I take a deep breath and draw my hands back to my lap. “Then it’s up to me to show you what God looks like.”

She grins at me, her sleepiness chased away by playful thoughts. “Really? Did you go up to heaven and take a picture of Him or something?”

I poke her nose with my finger. “No, silly goose. It’s just that I’m your father, and it’s my job to show you what God is like. When God

INTRODUCTION



makes a father, He pours a bunch of His own qualities into him, the stuff that makes good fathers.”

“Like what?”

“Like protection, guidance, and—” I pause for effect and then tickle her ribs. “And anything that makes you smile.”

She giggles and pushes my arms away, and I gently take her hands into mine. When she settles down, she grins again and says, “I think I’d rather have a picture.”

I straighten my frame, my head held high, absurdly showing off my profile. “Well, then, think of me as your picture of God.” We both laugh, and I tuck her in tightly once more, whispering to settle her thoughts. “I can’t be everything God is, sweetheart, but I can show you how He loves you like a father. I’m not a picture from a camera, but I am like an image of His fathering ways.” I caress her cheek with tender fingers and add, “Will that be enough?”

She smiles and her eyes begin drooping again, her voice stretching into a yawn. “That’ll be enough.”

I watch her eyelids close, and I sigh. Will I be able to fulfill my promise? Can I possibly bridge the gap between heaven and earth and reflect God’s perfect love in a way she can understand?

What does God look like, anyway? Do I know Him well enough myself? I pray that my feeble attempts will be empowered by God’s own desire to show His fathering character to my children.

With tears welling in my eyes, I finish my song, hoping my sweet girl will learn the everlasting song of God’s love, fusing her soul with God as she bears witness of His fathering heart in mine.

I want to take Your word and shine it all around;
But first, help me just to live it, Lord.
And when I’m doing well
Help me to never seek a crown;
For my reward is giving glory to You.