

Good parents must choose daily to love selflessly.

LINC

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God, the Perfect Parent

Today is a day to celebrate our moms! A recent viral YouTube video titled “The World’s Toughest Job” is inspiring appreciation for moms. In this video, job candidates are presented a list of outrageous employment requirements by a man interviewing for a made-up company. Employees must work more than 135 hours per week, remain constantly on their feet, and receive no vacation time. Basically, they must give up their personal lives. The amazing part is that these “employees” receive no pay! In the end, the video reveals that both the job and the interviews were a prank, and the actual job being described is motherhood. Created by the American Greetings Corporation to promote Mother’s Day, the video highlights the sacrifices that moms make every day for their kids.

God’s Sacrificial Love

Parents sacrifice their personal needs and wants to help their children grow into healthy individuals. Good parents must choose daily to love selflessly. However, even the best parents sometimes fail at this task due to their sinful nature. As Christians we have assurance that the Lord, the perfect Parent, will never fail. God always loves unconditionally. This assurance comes through Christ who died on the cross for the forgiveness of sin and to heal us of the resulting brokenness—the ultimate example of God’s sacrificial love.

Parental Images of God

Thinking about the Lord as a parent can help youth relate to God in a more intimate way. Jesus changed the way people in his day related to God by calling God his Father. While the language used in the Bible to describe God’s parental nature is “Father,” the references to God’s motherly characteristics abound. In the Old Testament there are several references to God giving birth and carrying the Israelites in the womb (see

Deuteronomy 32:18 and Isaiah 46:3-4). In the New Testament, Jesus likens God to a mother hen gathering her children under her wing (see Matthew 23:37). Understanding that God has both fatherly and motherly characteristics expands our personal image of God and the ways we can know and relate to God.

Tip for This Issue

Be mindful of youth who have broken relationships with their parents. Acknowledge that their earthly parents make mistakes. Some students may have a hard time relating to God as a parent if their relationship with their parents is unhealthy. Remind students that even though their earthly parent may disappoint them, their heavenly Parent is always there for them and working for their good.

Teacher Bible Prep



HEAVENLY PARENT

PURPOSE: To help youth relate more intimately with God's parental love.

QUESTION OF THE DAY: When has someone sacrificed something for you?

CULTURAL CONNECTION: Mother's Day

TOPIC: Understanding God's Parental Love

The Nature of God

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on the earth." God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them. —Genesis 1:26-27

Commentary:

God is not male or female in the way that people think of on earth, but God is Spirit (see John 4:24a). Being created in the image of God does not necessarily mean people physically look like God. However, humans do encompass many godlike attributes. Since humanity is created in the divine image, the Lord must possess masculine and feminine attributes. These verses describe God as a communal being through the use of the words *our* and *us* when referring to the Trinity: God, the Son, and Holy Spirit. Humanity is therefore designed to live in community as well. The dependent relationship we have with our parents as children is our first experience of this community.

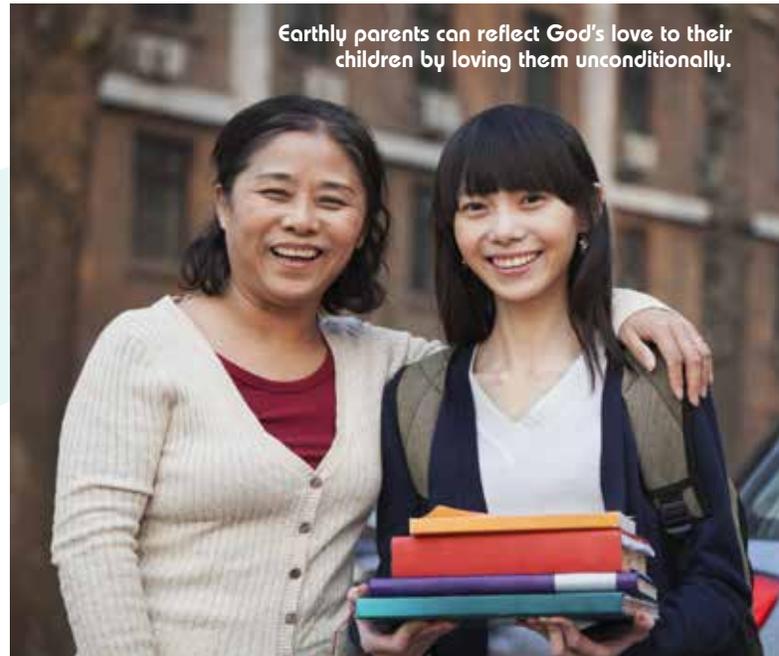
Questions to think about:

- When you picture God, what images come to mind?
- What are some examples of God displaying fatherly and motherly love in your life?

God's Love in Action

1 John 4:9-10

This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins. —1 John 4:9-10



Earthly parents can reflect God's love to their children by loving them unconditionally.

Commentary:

Earthly parents can reflect God's love to their children by loving them unconditionally. The heavenly Parent revealed the deepest love of all by sending Jesus to take humanity's place on the cross. Through Jesus' death and the forgiveness of sin, God's children can have an intimate relationship with the Creator through this undeserved sacrifice. This sacrificial love demonstrates how incomprehensibly wide and deep God's love is for us (see Ephesians 3:18).

Questions to think about:

- Who in your life has loved you the most?
- What does it mean that our salvation is undeserved?

Accepting the Role of a Parent

Luke 1:29-38

Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." —Luke 1:38

Commentary:

Mary accepted her role as the mother of the Savior from the moment it was foretold that she would give birth to Jesus. In doing so she risked her life, her relationship with Joseph, her safety, and her reputation. Embracing God's plan also meant trusting God with the circumstances and outcome surrounding Jesus' conception and his death. However, it did not mean she would be spared hardship, as she suffered at the foot of the cross while watching her son die (see John 19:25). Mary is a true example of what it means to accept the role of parent and trust God with our children.

Teacher Bible Prep



Questions to think about:

- Do you think Mary knew her son was going to die in order to save the world?
- Has there been a time in your life when you accepted God's parenting plan even though you didn't want to and it was difficult? Reflect on that time.

NOTE TO LEADER: It is estimated that one-third of American children (15 million) are being raised without a father and nearly 5 million without a mother (<http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/the-number-of-children-living-in-single-parent-homes-has-nearly-doubled-in/>). This means that, in some way, parentlessness touches every student in your youth ministry.

Sensitivity to this reality is important while talking about God's loving, parental nature. One way to help students understand God's parental nature is to help them understand that all human parents fall short—but God does not. God is the parent we all desire and can trust. Of course, trust takes time. Think about how you and your church can walk beside students who are learning to trust God.

DEVOTION: TRUSTING THE HEAVENLY PARENT

Spend a few moments reflecting on your relationship with your own parents.

- In what ways have your parents shown sacrificial love?
- In what ways have your parents failed to love you with godly love?

Every parent fails to love her or his children perfectly. Just as parents are meant to love their children like God, children must sometimes show love to their parents through Christlike forgiveness. Take some time and ask God to help you forgive your parents for times they failed.

Now read Isaiah 49:14-15.

- Has there been a time in your life when you felt like your heavenly Parent had forgotten you?

Do something this week to express gratitude for times your parents sacrificially loved you. Also, spend some time in prayer thanking God for sacrificially loving you.



Are you a parent? If so, trust God with your children.

NEXT WEEK: With the recent debut of ABC's new summer TV series *Black Box*, the national spotlight is focused squarely on the issue of mental health. Coincidentally, May is Mental Health Awareness month, and next week's LINC will tackle the issue head on, pointing students to the promise of Scripture that God is present in the midst of the pain and suffering that accompanies it.

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Writer: Samantha Tidball

Editor: Jack Radcliffe (jradcliffe@umpublishing.org)

Production Editor: Pam Shepherd

(pshepherd@umpublishing.org)

Template Designer: Ken Strickland

Honoring Our Parents

GETTING READY: You will need a dictionary or a digital device with access to an online dictionary, a computer or tablet with YouTube access, copies of “Work it Out” on Page 6, a piece of candy for each person in your group, a large candy bar, Bibles, paper, two thank-you notes for each youth you expect, and markers or colored pencils.

OPEN

Understanding Sacrifice (10 minutes)

Begin the lesson by showing the YouTube video “The World’s Toughest Job” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HB3xM93rXbY>. After the video, ask the following:

- Were you surprised at the end of the video? Or, did you guess that the interviewer was actually talking about the responsibilities of moms?
- How would you have responded if you were the person being interviewed?

Ask for a volunteer to look up the definition of the word *sacrifice* (use the Merriam-webster.com dictionary, if possible). Emphasize the idea that sacrifice means to give up something to help someone else. Now ask students the Question of the Day: *When has someone sacrificed something for you?* Be prepared to give examples from your own life.

EXPLORE

Talk Topic 1: The Nature of God (10–15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:26-27. Point out the space provided on Page 6 and instruct students to draw

images that come to mind when they pray or think about God. Ask a few volunteers to talk about their ideas with the rest of the group. Then, ask the following:

- Do you think God is male, female, or Spirit? Allow youth to pair up and discuss their thoughts with a partner.

After a few minutes, explain that usually God is referred to as “our Father” in the Bible. Not too many people acknowledge God’s motherly characteristics.

Assign students to small groups, or the previous pairs, and assign them a verse or verses from the Scriptures listed in the “God’s Motherly Characteristics” column on Page 6. Ask each small group or pair to write the image associated with the verse in the right-hand column. (An example is provided on Page 6.) Call on groups, one at a time, to tell the image their verse mentions.

High School Option

Ask youth to close their eyes and try to picture God. Then ask, “What images or words came to mind when you were trying to picture God?” Allow time for responses, then ask:

- Is it easy or hard for you to think of God as a parent?

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:26-27, then ask:

- What does it mean to be created in God’s image?
- Why did the author of Genesis use the words *us* and *our* in these verses?

After emphasizing that God has female/motherly and male/fatherly characteristics, ask students to partner up. Point out the example on Page 6, then ask the first partner to find and read the first three verses (after the example) listed in “God’s Motherly Characteristics” and list the images associated with those verses. Instruct the second partner to do the same using the last three verses. Allow time for partners to talk to each other about their findings.

Talk Topic 2: God in Action (10–15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Hand out candy to all the students (keeping a piece for yourself) except for one, and instruct students to wait before opening the candy. Ask if there is any student who is willing to give up her or his candy to the person who did not receive a piece. (If no one volunteers, then give your candy to the student who is without.) Explain to the group that the person who chose to give away his or her candy made a sacrifice, giving up something that was wanted in order to show love to a peer.

What image comes to mind when you think about God?

Honoring Our Parents



What did God sacrifice for you?

Say, “Sacrifice is one way to show love to one another, and it is the biggest way God showed love to us—by sacrificing Jesus.”

Ask the student who gave away the candy to tell how it felt to do so. Ask the student who received the candy how he or she felt to receive this gift. After both students answer, present a large candy bar to the student who gave away the original candy. Say: “Sacrifice may seem, at the time, like you lost or gave up something you wanted. But when you sacrifice to show love, what you receive in return is usually far greater than what you were holding onto in the first place.” Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 John 4:9-10. Then ask the youth:

- What did God sacrifice for you?
- Why did God make this sacrifice?

High School Option

Allow a few minutes for youth to read 1 John 4:7-16 and meditate on God’s Word. If necessary, use the commentary in Talk Topic 2 to help answer the discussion questions below.

- How do you know when someone loves you?
- What did God sacrifice for you and why?
- Do you think we deserve this act of sacrificial love? Why or why not?

! Bonus Small Group Discussion Option

Ask youth to think about all the people who love them and how much. Explain that no one will ever love them as much as God loves them. Call on someone to read aloud Ephesians 1:5-6. Ask:

- What does it mean that you are adopted by God?
- Why do you think it is difficult for some people to think of God as a parent?
- What is given freely to you that the author, Paul, is referring to in these verses?
- How would you help someone who doesn’t have a good relationship with his/her earthly parents to understand God as a perfect parent?

Talk Topic 3: Accepting God’s Parenting (10–15 minutes)

Middle School and High School Option

Form three groups and assign each one of the Scriptures below, handing out paper and markers or colored pencils. Instruct each group to read its assigned passage and summarize it, either by writing it in their own words or drawing it using stick figures. Also ask each group to select a storyteller to report a summary of the Scripture.

Group 1: Luke 1:28

Group 2: Luke 2:25-35

Group 3: John 19:25-28

When groups are ready, call on each group’s reporter to present its summary and call on youth to show drawings. Then, ask and discuss:

- What did Mary sacrifice by accepting God’s plan to be the mother of Jesus?
- What does Luke 2:35 foreshadow about Mary?
- When the angel told Mary she was going to give birth to God’s Son, do you think she knew her son would die in order to save the world?
- When is a time in your life that you had to embrace God’s plan even though you didn’t understand it?

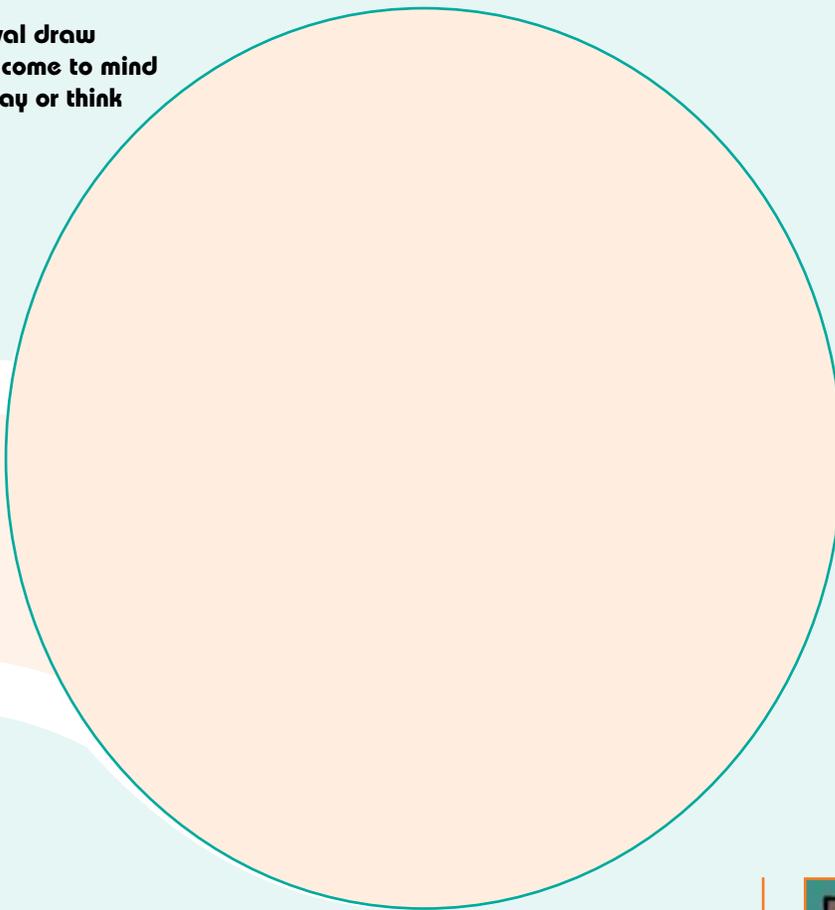
TAKE AWAY

Mother’s Day and Father’s Day are not only times to show gratitude to earthly parents but also towards the heavenly Parent. Hand out thank-you notes and ask each youth to write a note to her or his mom (or a motherly influence), expressing thanks for the many sacrifices. Then encourage youth to write a thank-you note to God, the perfect Parent, expressing gratitude for Christ and his sacrifice.



Work It Out

Inside the oval draw images that come to mind when you pray or think about God.



IN THE BIBLE: READINGS FOR THE WEEK

- Monday: Read Matthew 7:7-11**
What do you need to ask for from God, your perfect parent?
- Tuesday: Read Galatians 3:26.**
What does it take to be identified as children of God?
- Wednesday: Read Exodus 20:12.**
How does honoring your parents bring honor to God?
- Thursday: Read Romans 3:23-25.**
Why was Jesus the only one who could be sacrificed for the sin of humanity?
- Friday: Read Colossians 3:20-21.**
How can you and your parents bring glory to God in your relationship with one another?
- Saturday: Read Romans 8:14-16.**
What does it mean that God's children are also heirs with Christ?



THE NATURE OF GOD

Read each verse listed below and beside it write the image in the verse that is associated with God.

God's Motherly Characteristics

MATTHEW 23:37

LUKE 15:8-10

NUMBERS 11:12

HOSEA 13:8

ISAIAH 46:3-4

DEUTERONOMY 32:11

PSALM 131:2

Images Associated with God

Hen gathering chicks under wings

Inherit the Mirth



WHAT'S TRENDING?

What do you love most about your mom? Tweet or post your response using #lvmymom to @AbingdonYouth or on Facebook: Abingdon Youth