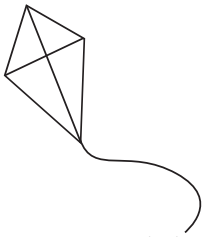
GIVE THEM JESUS



Raising Our Children on the Core Truths of the Christian Faith

DILLON T. THORNTON, PHD

Faith Words
NEW YORK NASHVILLE

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd v 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

Contents

Introduction 1
Don't Pass Your Children to the "Professionals" 1
Becoming a Parent-Theologian 5
Prioritizing Family Worship 8
Starting with the Apostles' Creed 14

Chapter 1. The Father

Theology and Pastries 19
Thinking Rightly About the Triune God 21
Focusing on the Father 28
The Creator and His Good Creation 34

Chapter 2. The Son's Identity and First Coming

What Scrooge and Schwarzenegger Have in Common 49
Of Apple Trees and Apples: Humanity's Sinfulness 52
The Son with No Beginning: Jesus' Deity 56
God with Meat: Jesus' Humanity 60
The Mission of the God-Man 65

Chapter 3. The Son's Death and Resurrection

The Challenge of Explaining the Cross to Our Children 75
The Event of the Crucifixion: What Happened at Golgotha? 77
The Dilemma of Our Pardon: Why Can't God Just Forgive Us? 81
The Perfect Substitute: What Is the Meaning *of the Cross and the Empty Tomb?* 85
"Look to Jesus" 91

Chapter 4. The Son's Present Ministry and Second Coming

The New Creation and the Shark Who Ate Me 103
The Appearance and Disappearance of Jesus: Understanding the Ascension 105
The Uncertainty of Jesus' Reappearance 112
The Reality of Resurrection 118
Planet Heaven 122

Chapter 5. The Holy Spirit

Killing the Heavenly Buzz 135
He Who Is God 137
He Who Gives Life 140

He Who Guides and Empowers 147
Scratching Dragons, Talking to Statues 155

Chapter 6. The Church
Why We Can't Be "Done" with the Church 167
Four Essential Features of the People of God 170
Three Questions to Ask of a Potential Church Home 178
Concluding and Beginning Again: We Never Outgrow Our Need for the Gospel 187

Acknowledgments *197*
Notes *199*

1
The Father

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

THEOLOGY AND PASTRIES

Recently I attempted to explain to my five-year-old son, Cullen, that God is distinct *from* creation, yet he is perpetually and intimately at work *within* creation. As I would soon find out, this is not an easy concept to comprehend for a child who wears Lightning McQueen underwear. Later that week, Cullen had an appointment at the dentist. When he's brave at the dentist, we generally reward him by taking him to his favorite donut shop, which, it just so happens, is located right in front of our dentist's office. Strategic on the dentist's part, I've always thought. Cullen loves donuts. Really, really loves them. The great theologian, Augustine of Hippo, once wrote that innocence is found

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 19 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

in the child's limbs, not in the child's mind.[1] A child would kill you for what he wants, if not for his feeble limbs, Augustine declared. Well, Cullen might not kill you, but he would certainly rob you and put your money to good use buying donuts. On this particular day, the grandparents took Cullen to get his delectable, post-dentist treat. He was just about to take that monstrous first bite when, suddenly, he paused, looked up with a petrified expression, and asked: "Is God *in this donut*?" The grandparents promptly replied, "Ask your daddy."

My two boys are inquisitive, and I'm guessing they are not unique in this respect. Your children and mine will have questions, questions about sin and salvation, good and evil, God and grasshoppers, theology and pastries. We can't know when these questions are coming, but of this we can be certain: every inquiry is an opportunity to "train children in the right way."[2] *Children of faith need the diet of doctrine, and in the home, parents are the preparers of truth.* This means that Christian guardians must first have a firm grasp of the core teachings of the historic Christian faith. They then need to develop ways of explaining these tenets to their children without inadvertently diluting or distorting the faith. We begin in this chapter with the doctrine of God. When we lead our children to the water so they can drink deeply of the greatness of God, there will be

born within them a God thirst that can never be satisfied by any lesser stream.

THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT THE TRIUNE GOD

One of my favorite twentieth-century writers is A. W. Tozer. Excluding the Scriptures, Tozer wrote what is probably the most influential sentence I have ever read: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."[3] He goes on:

> *The gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech.... Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when*

> *you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.*[4]

I want to rephrase Tozer's assertion to increase the forcefulness of it for parents in particular: *The most important thing about your child is his or her idea of God.* This is a countercultural claim, I know. Parents today tend to value most whatever it is they think will take their children farthest in life. Even many Christian parents have been duped into worshiping the success-promising trinity of good looks, good grades, and athletic ability. Having a high batting average is not a bad thing. The point is that if my power-hitting sons don't understand the greatness of God, I have not done my duty as a parent-theologian. In the same way, those who help their daughters to victory in a multitude of beauty pageants but who neglect to teach them about the majesty of God have failed their little girls. The truth is that both batting cleanup and winning pageants pale in comparison to thinking rightly about God.

How, then, do we develop right thinking about God, both in ourselves and in our children? The French reformer John Calvin says that all people have some conception of God. The problem, according to Calvin, is that we do not "apprehend

God as he offers himself."[5] In other words, the issue is not that God is absent from our minds; the problem is that the God present in our gray matter is a made-up deity we have fashioned to suit our fancy. We are not free to invent our own ideas of God. Rather, our concept of God must correspond as nearly as possible to what God has revealed about himself.

This brings us to the Apostles' Creed. When the Creed opens with the statement "I believe in God," it means the God who reveals himself in the inspired Word, Holy Scripture, and supremely in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.[6] Man does not discover God; God reveals himself to man. God has *spoken to us* through the prophets and apostles, and he has *come to us* in the person of Christ. Thus, the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (pronounced *Bart*, like *Bart Simpson*) is correct when he explains that Christ does not appear in the second act of the Creed only. "The whole Creed refers to our knowledge of God in Jesus Christ."[7] Not only is the Creed *Christological* or *Christ-centered*, but also it is *trinitarian*. The Creed has three main parts. In each part, a member of the Trinity takes center stage: (1) "I believe in God, *the Father*"; (2) "I believe in *Jesus Christ*"; and (3) "I believe in *the Holy Spirit*." The God of whom the Creed speaks has a "Christian name": Father, Son,

and Spirit. This notion requires careful consideration, for children's literature, sermons, and lessons comprise a hotbed of heretical teaching, and nowhere is this truer than when dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity.

From beginning to end, Scripture attests to *the oneness of God*. In the Pentateuch, we read: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."[8] Jesus quotes this Old Testament text when he is asked about the most important commandment: "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' "[9] The idea of the oneness of God reverberates in the Pauline Epistles: "Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God."[10] The consistent witness of Scripture is that God is one.

Yet the Bible also insists on *the "threeness" of God*. That the Father is God is evident from the fact that we are told to pray to him: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."[11] That the Son, too, is God is clear from numerous New Testament texts, such as when the writer of Titus speaks of "waiting

for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."[12] Finally, the divinity of the Holy Spirit is affirmed most clearly in Acts 5:3–4, where Peter tells Ananias that lying to the Spirit constitutes lying to God.[13] Thus we find in the Bible a dual declaration: (1) There is one God; (2) The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. Confused yet?

The early Christians were, too. Over the course of many centuries and numerous debates, the church formulated an explicit doctrine of the Trinity, the *"three-in-oneness" of God*. The crucial terms of triune thinking are (of course) three: unity, equality, and distinguishability.[14] The Christian God is one indivisible unity. Christianity does not have three gods, but one God who meets us in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By "person," Christian theology does not mean "human being." Rather, the best way to think of personhood is to say that being a person means having the ability to give and receive love. Each person of the Trinity is fully God. Subordinationism sees the Father as superior and the Son and the Spirit as some sort of second-rank deities. Modalism claims that God has three modes of existence that are not simultaneous. God's mission at a given time determines which form (Father, Son, or

Spirit) he takes. On the contrary, the Christian teaching is that the persons of the Trinity are coequal and coeternal. Though equal, the persons are distinguishable; the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and so on. We may summarize the classical trinitarian teaching as follows.

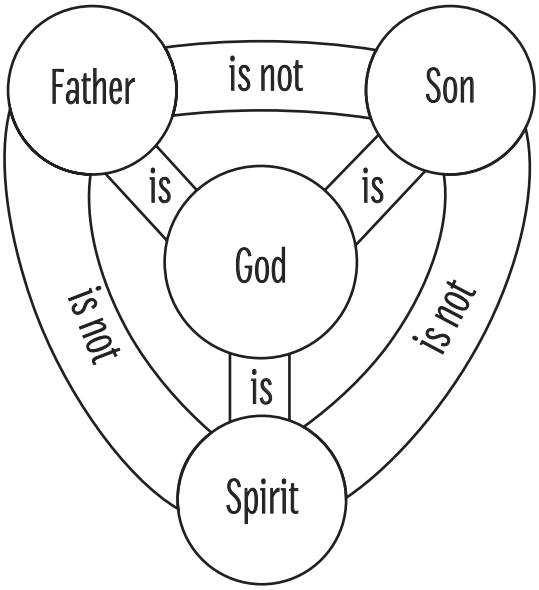
> God eternally exists as three distinct persons:
>
> Father, Son, and Spirit.
>
> Each person is fully God.
>
> There is one God.[15]

The triune reality of God is a mystery; Christians affirm the doctrine without fully understanding it. Our lack of complete comprehension shouldn't bother us. After all, a God small enough to be fully understood wouldn't be big enough to be worshiped. In an effort to help people, and especially children, better understand the doctrine of the Trinity, preachers and teachers have employed a wide range of analogies or comparisons. Parents would do well to avoid these. To suggest that God is like a three-leaf clover is inadequate, because each leaf is only part of the clover, and God has no parts; he is one indivisible unity. We run into the same problem when we liken God to an egg, which is composed of three parts: shell, white, and

yoke. Comparing God to the three forms of water—steam, liquid, and ice—is also problematic, because no amount of water can be all three forms at once, so when we use this analogy, we end up with a house full of miniature modalists!

Though clovers fail, most children will find it helpful to have something to look at, so I suggest using the "shield of the Holy Trinity," a diagram found in medieval symbolism. An English version of the shield is provided below.[16]

Kids love shields. And this one is really useful, as it captures important concepts of triune thinking, such as equality



and distinguishability. But perhaps the best way to help our children *experience* the triune reality of God is to teach them to pray. As my literary hero, C. S. Lewis, says:

> *An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get in touch with God (the Father). But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God (the Holy Spirit): God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying. . . . God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on. . . . God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed. . . . [The triune reality of God is being experienced] in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary [boy] is saying his prayers.*[17]

FOCUSING ON THE FATHER

The Apostles' Creed begins by affirming the fatherhood of God. If we scour the Scriptures, we can identify three principal ways in which the term "Father" is used of God. First, the term

"Father" characterizes God as the one who generates all things. We will consider this point in detail momentarily. For now, suffice it to say that, when we speak of God as Father in this first sense, we are speaking of his creative power. The author of Ephesians writes, "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name."[18] God created every family, and he proclaims his lordship over each one by naming it. Similarly, the Psalmist says that God determines the total number of stars, and gives to all of them their names.[19] Precisely what the names are doesn't matter. The important thing to note is that the Father is the Creator of the universe, and he exercises authority over all he has made.

Second, the title "Father" is used more specifically of God as the loving and protective Father of believers. Any idea of God as an impersonal force—something akin to a nebula or a puff of smoke—is ruled out by the reference to God as Father. God is a personal being who cares deeply for us and who desires our good. In this respect, God is like a human father. We must, however, avoid thinking of God as being in the *form* of a human father. For as John Calvin reminds us, "God's glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him."[20] God cannot "fit" into any shape we can construct, and we insult him when we try to cram him in. One of

the most amazing truths of Christianity is that it is *this infinite God* who enters into *a personal relationship* with believers. To receive Christ is to become a child of God. Surely this is the highest blessing of the gospel, to be taken into God's family and fellowship, to be established as his children and heirs.[21] As sons and daughters, we have the privilege of speaking with our Heavenly Father freely and without fear.[22] And he is a Father who knows how to give good gifts to his children.[23]

The fatherhood of God has to do not just with God's affection and provision, but also with his discipline of believers. The writer of Hebrews tells us that God "disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness."[24] Most people probably don't like the sound of this. Honestly, we prefer a geriatric deity kicked back in some corner of the cosmos, giggling at the lot of mischievous mortals. As C. S. Lewis puts it, "We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see young people enjoying themselves,' and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all.' "[25] But our Heavenly Father is far too concerned with our holiness to sit idly by. "Discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later

it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."[26]

At this point, a concern should be mentioned. Men and women who have had abusive or absentee earthly fathers often find the idea of God as Father to be offensive. Certainly, we are experiencing a family crisis, at least in the West. Millions of American children now grow up without fathers in the home. Can the idea of the fatherhood of God be salvaged for these fatherless children? Indeed it can. In fact, it must be. One way to deal with this concern is to reverse the direction of the analogy: rather than thinking that God is like our earthly fathers, we should understand that earthly fathers are called to be as loving as God is.[27] Every earthly father is a son of Adam, which means that no flesh-and-blood father is perfect, and always there will be some who will severely mistreat their children. When faced with the failures of our earthly fathers, we must remember that the true definition of fatherhood is to be found in God. Those of us who have been brought into God's family have done nothing to earn our place there, and we can do nothing to merit our banishment. By grace we have been brought into the Father's loving arms. By grace we are kept in his tight embrace. We are protected, provided for, and even chastened by God, yet never

cast off. We are sealed to the day of redemption; we will inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.

Third, the title "Father" is used to explain to us the relationship between the first and the second persons of the Trinity: he is the Father of the unique Son, Jesus Christ. Here we must recall the classical doctrine of the Trinity, which was summarized above. In the New Testament, the Son submits to the Father, as in Luke 22:42 ("not *my* will but *yours* be done"), not because the Father is greater or somehow "more God," but simply because this is how the members of the Trinity relate to one another. Also in the New Testament, Christ is called the Father's "only begotten Son" and the "firstborn of all creation."[28] Taken in isolation, these verses seem to teach that the Son was the first of God's creatures. But such texts must be understood in the context of others that clearly teach the eternality of the Son. The Son was with the Father from the very beginning, and everything the Father made was made together with the Son.[29] Arianism, a fourth-century heresy, claimed of the Son, "There was a time when he was not." But orthodox Christianity claims, "There *was not* when he *was not*." The point of the "only begotten" and "firstborn" language is to showcase the Son as the *heir* to all things. As the heir, Christ shares the Father's authority over all creation.[30]

Having examined the three ways in which the term "Father" is used of God, we turn now to the next term of the Creed: "I believe in God, the Father *almighty*." The Bible tells us many things about God. He is eternal, unchanging, all-present, all-knowing, good, holy, just, loving, wise, and so on. In theological lingo, these are the "attributes" or "perfections" of God. The question "What is God?" is a question we cannot answer exhaustively, for the finite cannot fully comprehend the infinite. But the questions "What is God like?" and "How should we expect him to act toward us?" are questions that are answered by God's attributes. The attributes are not separate parts of a composite God. Put another way, God is not presliced; he bears no resemblance to the pizza my family just devoured. The attributes cannot be considered as parts of God, because, again, he is *one indivisible unity.* It is therefore never the case that the "part" of God that is loving is active toward us one day while the "part" of God that is just is active the next. God is *entirely* loving and *entirely* just, and he is so all the time. *Everything* God does is fully consistent with *every one* of his attributes.[31]

The divine attribute that surfaces most in Scripture is the one expressed in this opening part of the Apostles' Creed: God is "almighty." The term "almighty" refers to God's sovereignty,

his all-pervading control. God's power is supreme over everyone and everything else, and he rules his creation directly. As the children's song says, "He's got the whole world in his hands." The term "almighty" is not, however, a declaration of God's ability to do any and all things. There is one important restriction on God's power, which Scripture pinpoints for us: "he cannot deny himself."[32] What this means is that God is able to do everything *that is consistent with his character*. God cannot use his power to act in evil, unjust, or unwise ways, because such things are inconsistent with his character. This is a remarkably comforting thought for those of us who belong to the Father almighty. God has committed himself to us, and the fact that he is almighty doesn't mean that he can or will change his mind about this.[33]

THE CREATOR AND HIS GOOD CREATION

The first part of the Creed concludes with an affirmation of God as the "Creator of heaven and earth." God is sovereign over all because he is the Creator of all. The Christian doctrine of creation may be stated in a memorable, child-friendly line: *Everything* was made by *the three-in-one Someone* who himself was

made by *no one.* God himself knows neither beginning nor end. The Psalmist writes, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."[34] God is the uncreated one or, more precisely, the uncreated three-in-one. Among the persons of the Trinity, there has been perfect communion and completion for all eternity; therefore, we cannot say that God created the world because he was lonely or somehow unfulfilled. God does not need humans, or any other part of his creation. "Need" is a creaturely word. Creation, then, is not an act of necessity, but of charity. To use once more the words of C. S. Lewis, "God, who needs nothing, *loves into existence* wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them."[35]

In the first chapter of Genesis, the loving work of creation is pictured as a language that only God can speak. "Once upon a time, everything was silent. There were no jazz clubs, infomercials, or thunderstorms. There were no barking dogs or honking horns. It was untamed tranquility."[36] Then, God *spoke*; and the universe *was.* Though the Father is in the foreground in the work of creation, Scripture indicates the involvement of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is described as the one "through"

whom creation came about.[37] The Spirit, like the Son, has been at work from the beginning, "hovering over the face of the waters," giving life to creatures.[38] To borrow a phrase from my older son's favorite flick, *The Lego Movie*, the triune God is the "master builder" of the cosmos. But unlike Emmet, who crafts things out of material already before him, God creates out of nothing. What scholars refer to as *creatio ex nihilo* ("creation out of nothing") is an important tenet of the Christian faith. If something other than God existed in the beginning, some maverick molecule, then God is not the *source* of all things, and thus is not *sovereign* over all things. Scripture teaches precisely what the Creed affirms: The eternal, uncreated God is the Creator of "heaven and earth," that is, *all things*, things great and small, high and low, visible and invisible. What this means is that pantheism, the belief that everything *is* God, is not so much false as it is hopelessly outdated. Once, before creation, it would have been correct to say that *everything* is God, because there was *nothing* except him.[39]

That the Scriptures begin with an account of the creation of the cosmos reveals that the question of origins is significant for Christian theology. In fact, so important are the teachings of the first chapters of the Bible that there were more commentaries written on Genesis 1–3 in the early centuries of the church

than on any other section of Scripture. But we must admit that there are some things about which Genesis does *not* tell us. Aside from the central belief that the world in which we live was established by the action of God, Genesis 1–2 are not interested in telling us *how* things were created. Precisely how long it took God to create the world, and the means he chose to achieve his purpose, are questions Genesis does not answer. The issue with the duration of the creative action is that the word our English Bibles translate as "day" is the Hebrew word *yôm*, which can refer to periods of time longer than 24 hours. Some Christians choose to believe the world was created in six 24-hour days, which is fine. The problem arises when this view is treated as the only position the true believer may hold. Genesis leaves ample room for other theories. In my mind, the creation of the sun and the moon on the *fourth* day, not the *first*, makes it difficult to argue for six 24-hour days, since the concepts of evening and morning would be meaningless without the sun. We also make a mistake when we read Genesis 1–2 as if they were intended to compete with modern cosmological hypotheses, such as the big bang theory. Parents need not fear such theories being taught to their children in public schools, because these theories do not necessarily contradict the teaching of the Bible. It may be that the universe burst into being

some 14 billion years ago. If so, Christian theology contends that it was God who lit the match, so to speak. In sum, Genesis 1–2 are not scientific descriptions, but poetic accounts, doxological declarations that direct our attention to the God who called the entire creation into existence.

The created world is "the most beautiful theater," the place where God's plan is played out.[40] In the *theodrama*, many characters take the stage, and each one has a purpose. We may not know why some creatures exist. What could possibly be the point of the Pomeranian? The mosquito? But whether we understand their purpose or not, all creatures matter, because they all originate with God and are able to give glory to their Creator. In their own ways, the star, the shrub, and the sloth lift up praises to God.[41] Within the community of creation, humans are unique. Humanity has been given "dominion" over the earth, a term that suggests a unique responsibility.[42] We must answer to God for the way we steward the resources he has supplied for us and his other creatures. Humans are also distinct in the created order in that we have been created in the "image" of God.[43] Men and women are created with the capacity to relate to God in ways other creatures cannot. We remain unsatisfied, unfulfilled, incomplete until we enter into a personal relationship with the one who made us.[44]

Evil is not part of God's creation. Genesis 1 affirms the fundamental goodness of everything God made. The existence of evil was the result of rebellion against God, rebellion made possible because God gave spiritual beings and humans the free will to disobey his commands. Disobedience first manifested itself among the angels. Satan, presumably a fallen angel, was permitted access to the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. They were deceived by him, sinned against God, and were therefore banished from God's presence.[45] All descendants of Adam and Eve inherit this broken relationship; in our natural state we are separated from God, slaves of Satan, sinners by condition and choice.[46] Whatever free will we possess, we can exercise only within the constraints of our sinful condition. An illustration that may prove helpful for children is this: We are free like fish in an aquarium are free.[47] We can do a thousand things, but the one thing we cannot do is escape from the confines in which we have been placed because of our first parents' sin. (Of course, if your children have seen *Finding Nemo*, then this analogy may be ruined, since in that movie the pesky little fish do manage to climb out of their aquarium!)

The doctrine of creation is not only about the God who made the world *in the beginning*; it is also about the God who is with us *in the now*. For starters, Scripture teaches that the

Creator remains present everywhere in his creation; God fills heaven and earth.[48] Unlike the pantheists I mentioned earlier, who propose that everything *is* God, Christians confess that God is present everywhere in creation, while maintaining that he is distinct from creation. Returning to my son's inquiry about the donut, I suppose it is right to say that God is present in pastries, because God *pervades* the oceans, the mountains, the trees, and all other parts of his world. But this does not mean that God is *enclosed* in any of these, because, as we have already learned, he is infinite. And it certainly does not mean that God *is* a glazed treat. To help children understand how God can be present within creation and yet distinct from creation, I suggest the object lesson of the sponge.[49] Fill a bucket with water and then wet the entire sponge. Next, explain to your children that, as the water is present everywhere in the sponge though different from the sponge, so God is present throughout his creation though distinct from it. You could further explain that the water inside the sponge is present but not visible. In the same way, God is always with us, even though we cannot see him with our eyes.

When the Bible tells us that God is present everywhere in creation, it does not mean that he merely sees everything that takes place within the theater of the universe. God is not a

spectator, some passive observer. Rather, God is present everywhere in creation and *at work in all things*. The Creator of all is also the everlasting Governor and Preserver; God sustains, nourishes, and cares for everything he has made. In the words of John Calvin, "Governing heaven and earth by his providence, [God] so regulates all things that *nothing takes place without his deliberation*."[50] Deism has no place for God in day-to-day life. For deists, God is the absentee landlord, the guy who rents us the flat (earth) and then disappears. To the contrary, Christians believe that God is intimately involved with his creation. The ultimate demonstration of God's continual involvement is the *incarnation*, the sending of the Son to deal with the corruption of God's good creation. This all-important subject is the focus of the next two chapters.

FAMILY WORSHIP GUIDE

The Apostles' Creed

As a family, memorize the first part of the Creed in three simple steps:

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

Key Verses

In addition to memorizing the first line of the Creed, choose one or more of the following passages to treasure in your heart:

THE CREATOR/MASTER BUILDER

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 NIV)

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27 NIV)

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 42 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

THE UNCREATED GOD

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:1–2 NIV)

CALLING ON OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7–8 NIV)

THE FATHER'S SENDING OF THE SON

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14 NIV)

Nuggets of Truth

Parent-theologians, when teaching your children-disciples, be sure to cover these main points from Chapter 1:

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 43 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT THE TRIUNE GOD

- The most important thing about us is what comes into our minds when we think about God.
- We are not free to invent our own ideas about God; rather, our concept of God must correspond as nearly as possible to what he has revealed about himself.
- God has revealed himself to us in the Scriptures and supremely in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- The Bible teaches us about the *"three-in-oneness"* of God. The doctrine of the Trinity may be summarized as follows: God eternally exists as three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); each person is fully God; and there is only one God.

FOCUSING ON THE FATHER

- In the Bible, we find three main ways in which the term "Father" is used in reference to God.
    - First, the term characterizes God as the one who creates all things.
    - Second, the title "Father" is used more specifically to refer to God as the loving and protective Father of believers. To receive Christ is to become a child of God.

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 44 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

- Third, the title "Father" is used to explain to us the relationship between the first and the second persons of the Trinity: he is the Father of the one-of-a-kind Son, Jesus Christ.

- The Bible tells us many things about God: he is eternal, unchanging, all-present, all-knowing, good, holy, just, loving, wise, etc. These are called the *attributes* or *perfections* of God. The attribute that surfaces most in Scripture is God's sovereignty, his complete control over his creation.

THE CREATOR AND HIS GOOD CREATION

- The Christian doctrine of creation may be stated simply: Everything was made by the three-in-one Someone who himself was made by no one.

- All creatures matter, because they all originate with God and are able to give glory to their Creator.

- Within the community of creation, humans are unique. We have been given *dominion* over the earth, which means that we must steward the resources God has supplied for us and his other creatures.

- We are also distinct in the created order in that we have been created *in the image of God*. Humans are created with the capacity to relate to God in ways other creatures

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 45 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

cannot. We remain incomplete until we enter into a personal relationship with the one who made us.

- Evil is not part of God's creation. The existence of evil was the result of rebellion against God, rebellion made possible because God gave spiritual beings and humans the free will to disobey his commands.

- All descendants of Adam and Eve inherit a broken relationship with God; in our natural state we are separated from our Creator, slaves of Satan, sinners by condition and choice.

Questions for the Family

Use these questions to spark discussion during your family worship times:

THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT THE TRIUNE GOD

- Where do we turn to learn the truth about God? Can you think of any misleading ideas about God communicated in books, movies, television shows, etc.?

- What does the term "Trinity" mean? Why is this doctrine so important?

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 46 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

FOCUSING ON THE FATHER

- What do we mean when we say that God is our Father?
- How does God show his fatherly love for us?
- What does the word "almighty" mean? How is the sovereignty (or special power) of God a comforting truth for us?

THE CREATOR AND HIS GOOD CREATION

- What are some of your favorite parts of God's creation?
- How do you think God wants us to treat his creation?
- How are people different from the rest of creation?
- If everything God created was good, how did sin and evil (or bad things) come into the world?

Songs That Celebrate These Truths

As you study the truths summarized in part one of the Creed, also celebrate these truths as a family. Sing the following songs together, and try to memorize at least the first verse of each one.

- "Holy, Holy, Holy"
- "All Creatures of Our God and King"

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 47 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM

Prayer Prompts

Always conclude your family worship times with prayer. Here are some prayer themes to keep in mind while your family studies part one of the Creed:

- The role of Scripture in learning the truth about God
- The truth of one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit
- The sovereignty or special power of God
- The beauty and goodness of God's creation
- The uniqueness of humans

GiveThemJesus_TPtextF1.indd 48 5/25/18 9:48:09 AM